とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）21
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 21

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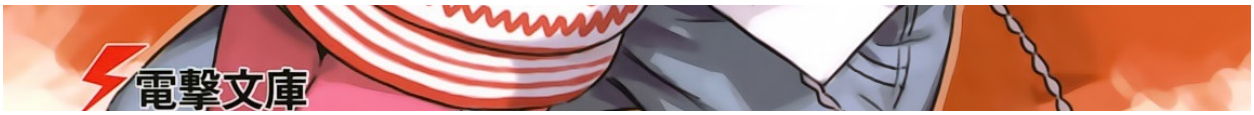

Toaru Majutsu no Index 21

October 30. Eleven days have passed since World War 3 began. Three boys, each keeping their thoughts to themselves, are advancing to Russia, now up in flames.

The former underling of "ITEM", Hamazura Shiage, kept seeking medical treatment for Takitsubo Rikou, yet he hasn't found any clues. The key to this would be to meet with the Saint, the former member of "God's Right Seat", Acqua.

The strongest level 5, Accelerator, after clashing with his weakest rival, was transported to the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. However, he still could not see any means to save Last Order. The key to this would be the magic described on a mysterious parchment.

And as for Kamijou Touma, even as he had a chance meeting with Fiamma, he managed to flee after the latter went easy on him. His wish to restore Index did not come true. The key to this would be a being from another dimension who goes by the name "Angel".

Three different thoughts were kept close to their respective owners' hearts, and when science and magic clash, there, the story shall begin——!

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Kamachi Kazuma

The enemy is now the Archangel. But then again, we have an artificial angel as an ally, first class people wielding their powers as much as they want, not to mention people capable of weakening the Archangel, so it's quite a busy battle. It means that now people can make guesses about the rankings of the power balance on both the science side and magic side, but maybe it's getting a bit technical?

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~21
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
Heavy Object
Heavy Object: Adoption War

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Though I don't really watch that much television, travel and soccer programmes are a different story. At the point in time when I was writing this, the World Cup had not ended yet. Who would win this, I wonder. And I feel like going on a holiday as well.

カバー／装画担当

"Why are there stars glittering in your eyes?
And why are you licking your lips like that!?"
Academy City's Level 0 student — Kamijou Touma
"Th-this is my chance!! I'll pay for it with my body!!"
Member of a British magic cabal reserve army, "New Light" — Lessar
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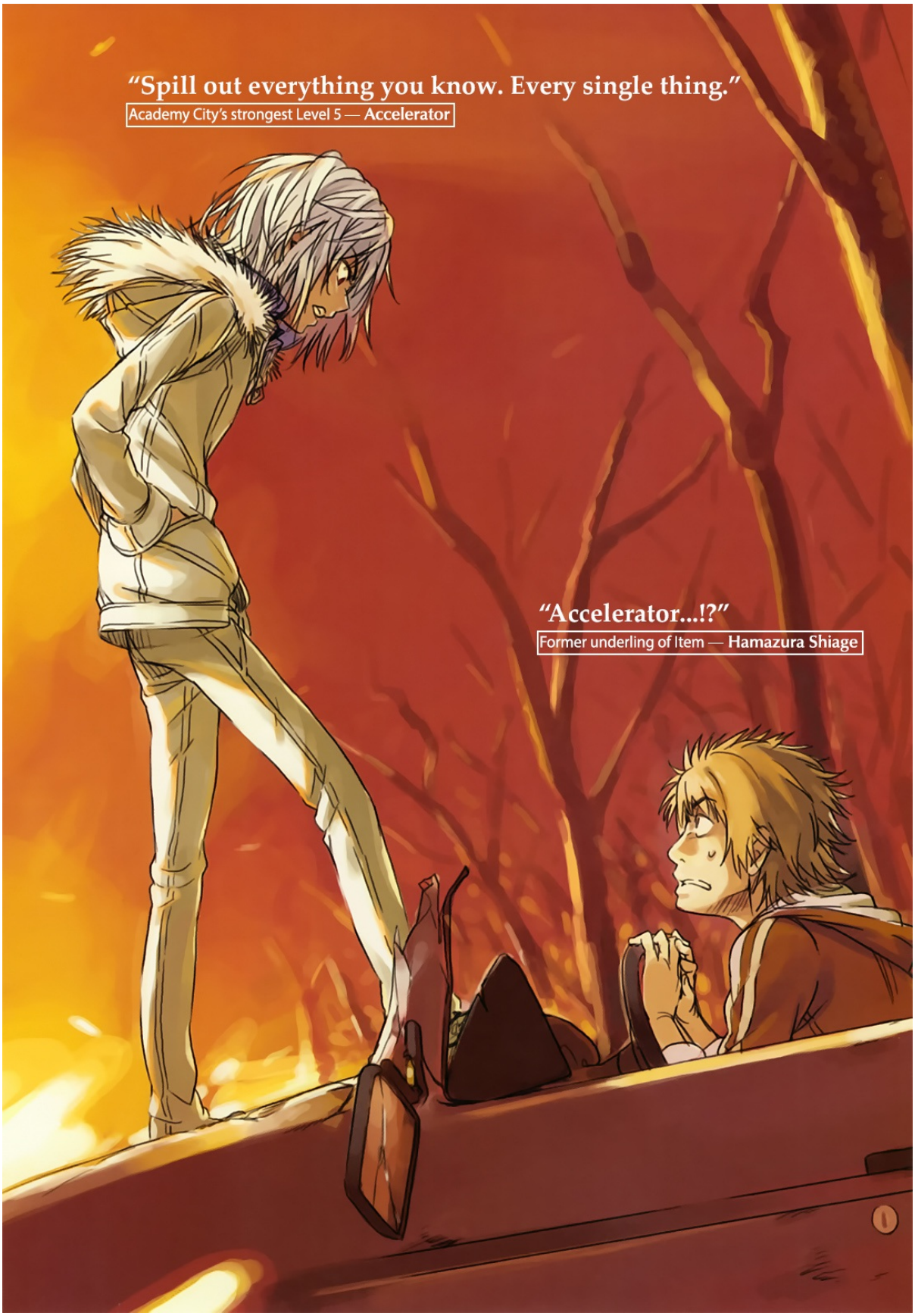
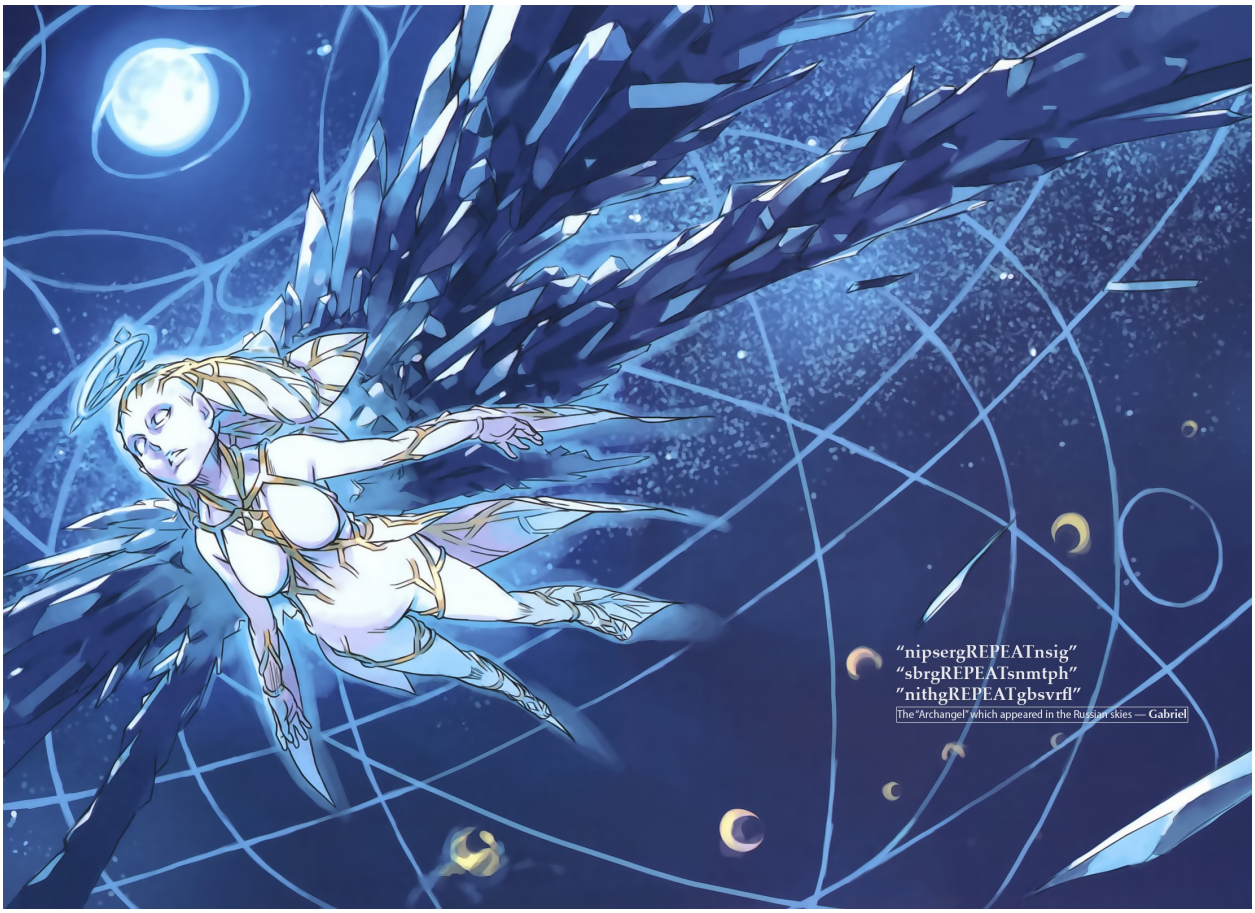
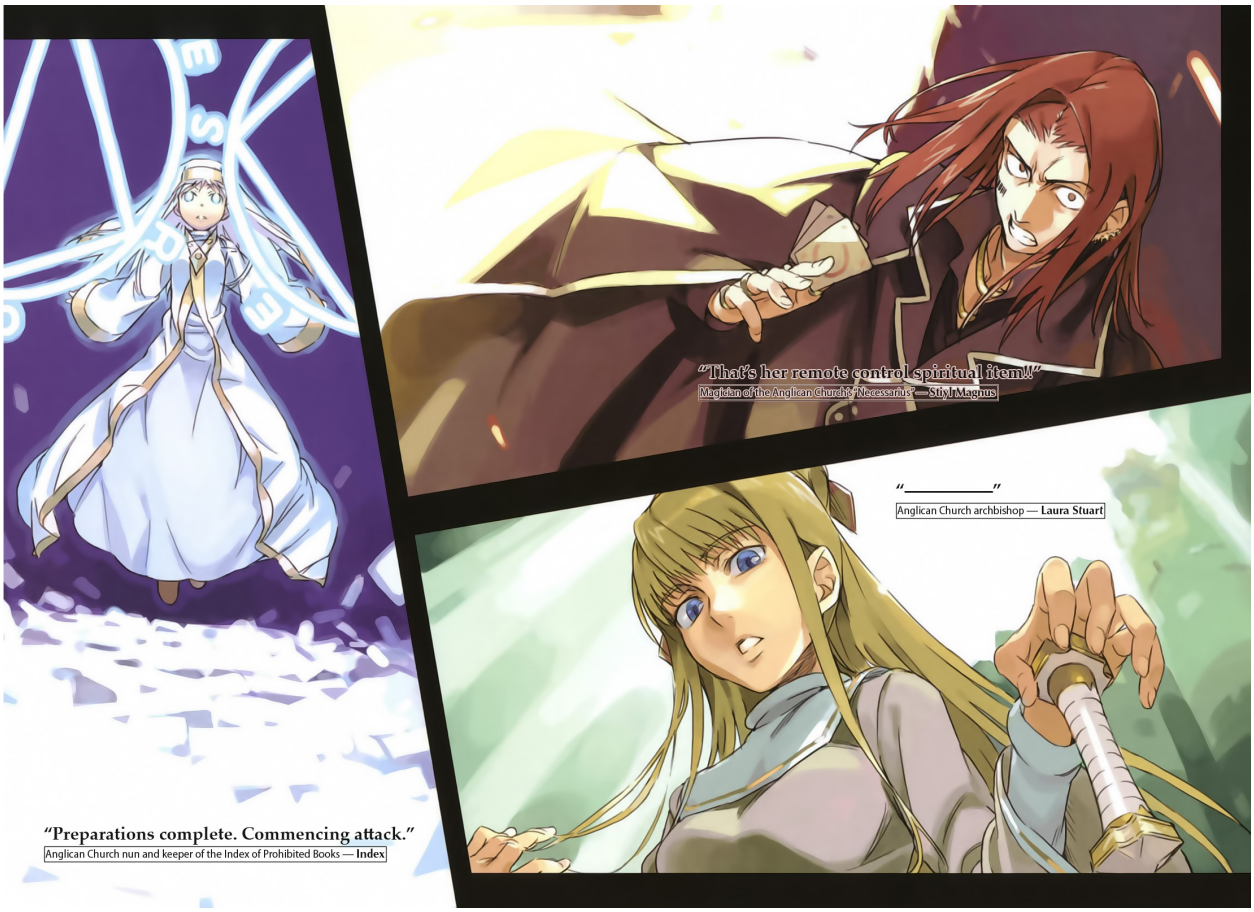

"Spill out everything you know. Every single thing."
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator
"Accelerator...!?"
Former underling of Item — Hamazura Shiage

"Are you here on private business as well?
says Misaka as she asks for confirmation."
Sister entrusted to a Russian Academy City Cooperative Instituation — Misaka 10777
"...Well, it certainly isn't an official job or anything."
Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School's Level 5 — Misaka Mikoto



The "Archangel" which appeared in the Russian skies — **Gabriel**


"That's her remote control spiritual item!!"
Magician of the Anglican Church's Necessarius — Stiyl Magnus
"_____"
Anglican Church archbishop — Laura Stuart
"Preparations complete. Commencing attack."
Anglican Church nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index

“Misaka seems to be getting excited about these developments in so many aspects☆”

Clone of Mikoto created by the Sisters Third Season — **Misaka Worst**

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294 War Report

War Report

World War III had finally begun.

On a thin LCD TV, a female reporter holding a microphone and with a solemn expression on her face could be seen in the landscape of blowing snow and black smoke.

“It has been 11 days since the war began. Even now on October 30th, there is no sign of the war weakening here near the border with the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations!! Wah! Was that an Academy City bomber!? As the Japanese government has repeatedly denied any intention to join in the war, Academy City must be carrying out this incident alone.”

Not only the civilians were panicked.

A female Russian air force pilot gritted her teeth in the battle above the Sea of Japan.

“What do they mean they’re only putting in the minimum effort needed for a defensive line? This is enough firepower to turn all of Russia into a sea of flames 10 times over!!”

“This is Kameyama Ryuuta from Academy City. I’ll shoot you down gently, so don’t worry, young lady. You can’t escape lasers that fly at the speed of light.”

The spiky haired boy named Kamijou Touma and the magician girl named Lessar walked through the white land of Russia that was at the center of that war.

“It’s Fiamma again. He’s started a war against Academy City from behind the Roman Catholic - Russian Orthodox alliance.”

“Fiamma is a man of the magic side through and through, so I doubt his only goal is to gain control of the army. The timing of him obtaining the remote control spiritual item that gives him access to Index Librorum Prohibitorum’s 103,000 grimoires is also troubling.”

“Either way, there’s only one thing I need to do: punch Fiamma and save Index.”

At the same time, Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou drove through an area near the border of Russia and the Elizalina Alliance in a stolen car.

“Either way, we can’t do this without that city’s tech. Defeating that city will not work as our goal.”

“Hamazura, we need to find something to negotiate with in this war. Find a bottleneck in this fight between Academy City and Russia where you can affect the outcome with what you do. If you search there…”

Inside a freight train rushing along a track running horizontally across Eurasia, Accelerator crouched down holding Last Order who had mostly lost consciousness. The appearance of the supernatural being known as Aiwass had put a great strain on the Misaka Network which had damaged the small girl.

After defeating a group of powered suits that had attacked the train, Accelerator recalled Aiwass’s words upon checking the contents of a trunk the attackers had tried to steal.

“Pieces of parchment, hm? Will they actually lead to a way to save this brat?”

To crush Fiamma’s plan, Kamijou and Lessar came to the Elizalina Alliance in order to guard Sasha Kreutzev, the nun needed for that plan. However, Fiamma showed up and easily defeated the magicians known as Elizalina and Vento of the Front who happened to be there. He then stole Sasha and spoke to Kamijou as he left.

“I look forward to seeing how the girl of the 103,000 grimoires chooses to punish you now that she knows everything.”

When Takitsubo's condition worsened, Hamazura was led to a town near the border of the Elizalina Alliance by a man named Digurv so that he could use the clinic. But that village was suddenly attacked by foreign privateers hired by the Russian army.

"What do we do? No matter how far we run, it's all over once they fire on us from the sky. We'll all be killed!!"

"We use the anti-aircraft gun. If we use the vehicle they left behind, we can fight back against the attack helicopters!!"

Accelerator and Last Order headed to a snowy plain near the remains of the Russian air force base where the parchment was supposed to be delivered. There, they were attacked by Academy City. The attacker was called Misaka Worst. She was a clone created in the Third Season project.

"They must be disposed of. The unusable old series must all be killed. The Misakas of the new series will create a new network."

In a forest near the village, Hamazura sat dumbfounded within the half-destroyed anti-aircraft gun.

The attack helicopter that had been flying through the air had been pierced through the side by a giant sword.

A strong mercenary pulled the sword out of the exploding remains of the helicopter.

"I, Acqua of the Back, will be presumptuous enough to lend you my help."

On a road from the Russian border to a town, Lessar gulped as she watched the battle between Kamijou Touma and Accelerator.

Accelerator's black wings divided countless times and attacked simultaneously from various angles. Kamijou used the fact that he could not use his right hand to negate all of them to instead "grab" the black wing and forcibly twist it.

But…

(Is that really enough to explain it?)

The defeated Accelerator woke up within the Elizalina Alliance to find himself in the back of a truck. A small memo had been left next to Last Order who lay next to him. Written there in messy handwriting was…

“Index Librorum Prohibitorum…”

And the war continued to involve more and more people as it spontaneously continued on.

Bewilderment colored the transmissions between the two fighter pilots battling above the Sea of Japan.

“The Kremlin Report…?”

“It’s a manual for defending the nuclear launch facilities using a bacterial wall. A killer virus kills only the people and leaves the facility undamaged. It seems the Russian military is already discussing using it since they feel as if they are losing. And no evacuation warning will be sent to the people living nearby.”

The Roman pope who was sleeping within a hospital in Italy’s capital slowly awoke. As he opened the window in the hospital room and prepared to leave through it, he magically communicated with the Russian Orthodox magician known as Vasilisa.

“I’m sure I have already lost my authority. My words are not enough to stop this war.”

“And yet you still stood back up. That means you are still worth using.”

Two supersonic bombers were preparing to leave from runways in Academy City’s 23rd district.

One of them held Academy City's #4 Level 5, Mugino Shizuri.

She had lost an arm and an eye and she was not hunting Russian soldiers.

"…Let's have some fuuun, Haaamazuraaa."

The other bomber held the #3 Level 5, Misaka Mikoto.

She had defeated the team meant to board the bomber and retrieve Kamijou Touma.

"I'm pretty pissed off, so take me to Russia if you don't want to get hurt."

In a base near the Russian border, Fiamma of the Right was magically communicating with the Russian Orthodox bishop named Nikolai Tolstoy.

"Academy City's military power including their unmanned weapons is overwhelming. We started this war on your suggestion, so surely you know how this will end for you if things continue this way!!"

"You needn't be in such a rush. If I told you I had Archangel Gabriel, would you keep spewing that nonsense?"

(…Of course, I'm not using that for such a boring reason.)

An angel created by another system of laws, an aggregation of Academy City's AIM diffusion fields named Kazakiri Hyouka, grew wings from her back and flew across the Sea of Japan.

She had only one reason: to rescue her friends.

"Please do not touch my friends. …If you do, I will become your enemy even if it means mutual destruction."

Inside St. George's Cathedral in England's capital, the magician named Stiyl Magnus trembled in anger. Before his eyes, a small figure got up using unnatural

movements.

She was Index, the girl who held 103,000 grimoires memorized within her brain.

“…Enemy confirmed. Now analyzing…the enemy’s spells and…construction a corresponding local weapon…”

Fiamma of the Right was using the war to gain everything he needed.

Kamijou Touma muttered a few words as he headed for Fiamma’s base.

“It’s true that I’m a terrible person who continued to deceive Index. But the one I should be bowing my head down to for that isn’t Fiamma of the Right.”

Chapter 5: The Complex Game Board that is a Battlefield. *Enter_Project.*

Part 1

A line of trucks was stopped at a town that was covered with pure white snow.

A spiky haired boy named Kamijou Touma sat within one of those trucks. The inside of the vehicle was filled with the smell of meat and sauce. The magician girl named Lessar sitting next to him was fishing through the paper bag from a worldwide fast food chain. It seemed the war had not had an effect on the distribution of goods needed for the restaurant.

Kamijou threw a nugget covered in red sauce into his mouth.

“I never thought I’d end up tasting this familiar flavor here in Russia. Don’t they at least have a borscht burger they only sell in Russia or something?”

“Having the same flavor all across the globe is actually pretty convenient. It’s especially useful when you don’t really like the local food,” responded Lessar as she found the fries she had been looking for.

However, Kamijou was not an international salaryman who went on overseas business trips a lot. He would rather give Russian food a try.

But he also knew that they were not in a position where they could just leisurely enjoy their food.

Lessar dipped the tip of a French fry into the red sauce Kamijou had while she spoke with a serious expression.

“We managed to get this far by mixing in with wartime group travelers and brokers smuggling people out of the country, but this is as far as we can go in the trucks. The Russian military base Fiamma is in is about 40 kilometers away. Just like when we got in before, we’ll sneak in using the underground train used for taking in materiel.”

“…But we’re coming from a different direction this time, right? I didn’t see this city last time.”

“If we entered through the exact same route, they’d find us right away. We restrained a Russian Orthodox magician at the station over there, remember?”

Lessar must have felt one French fry wasn’t enough because she then stuffed 4 or 5 more into her mouth like a Gatling gun of fries.

“From the slight accent in their speech, I’m pretty sure magicians living in this city were used at that station. That means it’s possible another track is prepared either here or nearby.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Secret bases are usually customized to be more easily used by the ones that work there. It’s simple enough to fill it with labyrinths and traps, but you can’t work quickly if it takes 2 or 3 hours to get through it all each time. As someone who has secretly set up and worked in bases in the UK, I know what I’m talking about.”

“Hmm,” said Kamijou as he ate his last nugget. “What do we do about the people who came in the trucks on Elizalina’s orders?”

“They were just there to play their part allowing us to pretend to be brokers smuggling people out of the country. They have a bit of military experience, but they can’t stand up to top class Russian forces and certainly can’t do anything against professional Russian Orthodox magicians. Now that we’ve made it this far, their role is over. They just have to pretend to have some ‘customers’ and return to the Elizalina Alliance.”

Complex feelings swirled within Kamijou’s chest. He wasn’t sure if that made him more uneasy or relieved.

His opponent was Fiamma of the Right, a top class monster even within the magic side.

He had no guarantee that he could win. Kamijou was just a high school student, so he wanted as much help as he could get. However, he had a hard time thinking of anyone who could take on that monster. He didn’t want to just use the people fighting alongside him as shields.

But then that applied to Lessar, too.

Kamijou glanced over at Lessar's face. She was stuffing salt-covered fries into her mouth.

"Mhat ih iht? (What is it?)"

"Nothing." Kamijou responded to Lessar's puzzled expression before he changed the subject. "So what's with these brokers?"

"Oh, are you not familiar with them? I would think they would have a good connection to Japan," Lessar responded lightly after swallowing her fries. "In countries with land borders, illegally crossing the border can be as easy as crossing a fence at night. And during a war, a seemingly unending stream of people will want to leave the country because of all the explosions and such."

"…Are there really that many people flowing into the Elizalina Alliance?"

"And the opposite too," Lessar said. "Whether Russia wins or Academy City wins, even an amateur can tell that it will be over before long. No one wants to belong to a losing country. In that way, fleeing the country is a gamble. Where you stand after the war can have a major effect on the rest of your life. If you misread things, you could end up being branded with the stigma of a losing country after fleeing the country, so you need to be careful. …It seems some people go back and forth between two different countries countless times. It's like they're restlessly waiting for the music to end in a game of musical chairs."

"…"

Kamijou didn't like the sound of that.

The people moving from one country to another were not doing it because someone else was forcing them. They were doing so of their own free will in order to gain happiness. But it was all based in unease and fear. Normally, they would have no need to abandon their homes and birthplaces.

It may be the same for everyone.

Of their own free will, people were mistakenly throwing out precious things that

they normally would not have needed to abandon. That may have been what that large war was as a whole.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Lessar said in a cheerful tone as she stuck her arm in the fast food bag and dug around. “Fiamma is pulling the strings of this war. Taking that bastard out is the fastest way to end this war and bring peace to the world. And if the UK can grab up a bunch of war reparations money, it’ll be a perfect ending.”

“…Yeah.”

Kamijou didn’t know what the war reparations thing was about, but he agreed with Lessar. Whatever was going on, what Kamijou had to do remained the same.

“I need to go punch Fiamma and save Index.”

“Now that that’s decided, I need to build up my nutrition with this triple!!”

“Hey, can you even eat that vaulting box-like burger without taking it apart?”

He didn’t think there was any way it would fit in Lessar’s small mouth.

“Don’t worry. I take pride in my ability to fit things so large in my mouth that it surprises everyone around me. And I don’t mind if you imagine that scene in an indecent way.”

After saying something incomprehensible as usual, Lessar bit into the three-layer hamburger. The large piece of food bent into a wide V-shape with Lessar’s mouth in the middle.

Immediately afterwards, the mass of ground beef shot out of the opposite side of the burger than Lessar was biting into. The juicy hamburger landed on Kamijou’s school uniform.

“…”

There was a short silence.

Kamijou looked between his clothes and Lessar’s face with a look of regret on

his face.

And then Lessar spoke up.

“Th-this is my chance!! I’ll pay for it with my body!!”

“Why are there stars shining in your eyes as you lick your lips!? You haven’t changed your ways at all!!”

Part 2

The explosions continued without ceasing.

Both the sky and land in Russia was white. In a place about 25 kilometers north of the border with the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations an unhealthy-looking black smoke disrupted that pure white landscape. Atop the snow stood tanks and other armored vehicles that looked like empty cans that had been crushed between gears. Chunks of concrete that had once been used in the walls and ceilings of buildings were also scattered about. The black smoke blotting out the white was coming from that wreckage.

Hamazura Shiage felt that it smelled of death.

But that wreckage was not from the vehicles that had attacked the village Hamazura and the others had been in.

It was the privateers’ base.

The fortress had been fortified with the latest Russian equipment, but it looked like it had been sucked into a whirlwind of destruction.

Of course, Hamazura and the others could not do something like that.

The privateers had attacked the village twice, but those attacks had not been

carried out by all of their forces. The number on standby at the base had actually been greater. The amount there was easily more than 5…no, 10 times as many. A certain number were needed just to keep the base running effectively.

Then who had done it?

The answer to that question was displayed through the binoculars before Hamazura's eyes.

Blue clothes.

A giant sword.

A large man who had called himself a mercenary.

Before that battle had begun, the man had exchanged a few words with them after taking out an attack helicopter, but Hamazura had not understood any of it. With terms like "Saint" and "magician", Hamazura felt as if the man were from some completely different culture.

There wasn't much he knew about the situation.

He knew the large man was named Acqua, he knew the man possessed some kind of power that was not an esper power, and he knew that the man was their ally and was thus going to assault the privateers' base.

It all seemed like some kind of joke.

But…

(…Are you fucking kidding me? I don't know how he's doing it, but I'm not even sure our Level 5s would be able to carry this out so one-sidedly.)

With each swing of his sword, a large amount of snow melted creating a few dozen tons of water that assaulted the tanks and other armored vehicles. The countless rockets fired from the helicopters were all intercepted by twice as many ice spears. A sphere of water vapor in the middle of the enemy lines exploded out and broke through the thick reinforced concrete fortress like a typhoon blowing through a plastic umbrella.

A supernatural phenomenon.

A natural disaster.

As it ignored gravity and floated hundreds of meters up in the air, that was exactly what the attacking great mass of water was. It was like becoming the prey of a giant snake. The privateers who had been so into the deadly fight before had chills going down their spines at the sight of such a one-sided massacre.

“What is that…?” muttered Digurv who was inside the same anti-aircraft gun. “Is that one the espers they say are being developed in Academy City?”

Hamazura knew it was not.

But the battle ended before he had a chance to say as much.

No, it hadn’t even been a battle.

Destruction, elimination, and subjugation were all better words for the 20 minute fight.

“…That is taken care of, but only for now I suppose. Even a rotten country can easily gain more people to do its bidding,” said the blue mercenary with no intonation in his voice while he rested his giant sword on his shoulder.

Hamazura had no idea when he had appeared.

Hamazura had been watching him through the binoculars until just a second before.

The mercenary was not even slightly out of breath. It made it seem absolutely ridiculous that he had been in a life or death battle just before.

(What the hell is going on?)

Hamazura opened the upper hatch and climbed out. He grimaced at the cold that seemed to cut into him and the smell of smoke that was many times stronger outside.

The large man wearing blue gripped a giant sword in his hand. The sword was more than 3 meters long and probably weighed a few hundred kilograms. It was clearly too big for a human to carry in one hand.

“Let me ask again: What are you?” Hamazura asked as he stood there dumbfounded.

“I am Acqua of the Back, a rogue mercenary.”

It seemed the man had intended to answer the question with that response, but it did not resolve any of the questions Hamazura had. He still did not know how the man gained his strength that exceeded the limits of the human body, where the man’s loyalties lay, and whose side he was on.

(An esper…?)

Hamazura was reminded of what Digurv had said before.

Hamazura had lived in Academy City up to that point, so he naturally put any mysterious phenomena in that category.

However, this was different.

Even then, spheres of water floated as if in zero gravity around the large man. They were the ones that had protected him from the heat, flames, and shockwave of the attack helicopters exploding.

An esper could not use two different powers.

(Is he controlling the water in his body to raise his strength? No, the human body is weak to internal pressure. Doing that would just cause his blood vessels and cells to burst, so that doesn’t explain it. But then…)

After thinking through it that far, Hamazura felt like he was being thrown back into the whirling chaos once more.

Could it be that there was something else out there that allowed one to overcome the normal laws of physics besides the psychic powers of Academy City?

“Hamazura,” called a voice from within the anti-aircraft gun.

It was the Russian soldier named Glickin who had fought alongside them. He looked at Hamazura with a face stiffened with tension.

“This is bad… The radio is picking up some kind of signal. Its encrypted, so I don’t know what it contains, but it’s getting stronger.”

“So whatever it is, it’s getting closer,” said Digurv who was also within the anti-aircraft gun. “Is it reinforcements for the privateers?”

“Wait,” Hamazura said cutting them off.

He knew who it was that was sending the radio transmissions.

He could see something on the white horizon with his binoculars. Over 30 tanks were headed in their direction. The technology used was fundamentally different from the technology in the vehicle Hamazura stood on. The general design and even the materials used in the armor were in a completely different league.

And the military force was not solely comprised of tanks.

Almost hiding behind the tanks that were in the lead, Hamazura could see numerous soldiers wearing what looked like suits of armor made of composite materials. The armored vehicles that did not have any weapons on them were likely power trucks that supplied electrical power for the various high-tech weapons. Flying above them all were 30 cm long objects that looked like simple radio controlled airplanes. They seemed to be reconnaissance UAVs, but some of them had small tubes installed on the wings. They were likely small grenades with tail fins like on darts to help them soar. That way those UAVs could easily carry out small bombings.

They were unlike the privateers from before.

It wasn’t just one type of weapon.

Many different types of soldiers and weapons were in the formation in order to make up for each other’s weaknesses. There was no sense of “having fun” visible in their equipment. There was no opening that could be taken advantage of, so Hamazura and the others had no way of winning.

Hamazura gulped and then spoke.

“It’s not the privateers…”

“What?”

Digurv frowned and Hamazura clarified.

“That’s an Academy City force.”

Hamazura had spotted soldiers lined up behind the tanks. The suits of armor made of composite materials they wore were Academy City powered suits. Hamazura didn’t know the specific type of tank he was seeing, but he knew that only Academy City could bring about something like that.

(…It looks like that’s the official force. They don’t seem connected to the darker side of things like we were.)

Of course, it was possible people from the city’s darkness were using the normal Academy City equipment, but Hamazura rejected that possibility based more on his sense of smell than knowledge. People in the darkness like Hamazura would not move about that openly. And even if they did, they would leave behind a certain “smell”.

“It seems they’re coming to occupy this area,” said Acqua in a flat voice as he rested his giant sword on his shoulder. “Should I destroy them?”

“…No. I don’t know if it’s what you’re after, but from the standpoint of protecting the village, it would be better if we didn’t resist,” Hamazura said shaking his head. “I don’t know who exactly you are, but I can tell you’re a true monster. And enough of one that I can’t figure out how you’re doing that stuff despite myself having lived in Academy City. However, you can’t just continue protecting one place, right? It would be better to just let Academy City set up camp here. Once they occupy the area, they’ll protect it for months. They’ll take care of any more privateers that get sent in. Lashing out now would not help that village.”

“…”

Acqua nodded slightly. He seemed to have accepted Hamazura’s view.

“But,” said Digurv. “Weren’t you being chased by Academy City, Hamazura?”

Hamazura froze at hearing that question.

But it only lasted a few seconds.

“…We have no other choice.”

They weren’t as bad as the privateers, but Academy City’s forces were not your normal army. Hamazura knew that because he had fled from them. But they would still be effective as a means of keeping the Russians and especially the privateers from attacking.

That village was a comfortable place. The people there had all worried about Takitsubo’s condition despite her having suddenly showed up. However, Hamazura couldn’t let Takitsubo and himself get captured by Academy City. That couldn’t happen until he had found something to negotiate with.

So he had no choice but to flee.

Hamazura had to flee from the village he had risked his life to protect.

“I doubt they know I’m here, but there’s a good chance they’ll figure it out when they use their complex sensors to search the area. I doubt they’ve brought any students out here, but if they do have Psychometer, they’ll figure it out right away. So don’t hide any information. Tell them everything that happened here. Don’t do anything that would make the soldiers suspicious. If you help them, they’ll protect you.”

Hamazura gathered his thoughts together and spoke to Digurv about a basic plan.

“Of course, the Academy City forces are not allies of justice or anything like that. They’re nothing more than a different military force from Russia. But you can use them and make them your allies. Just sell them the information on me and you can get their help.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding,” Digurv said quietly in a voice that was shaking with anger. “Do you really think we would abandon someone who fought for us just for our own convenience?”

“Then what are you going to do? Who knows when the privateers will be

replaced. It could be tomorrow or it could be in a week. It could be a few hundred of them and it could be a few thousand of them. Are you saying you can fight all of them on your own? That clearly isn't realistic."

"But…"

"I have no intention of having my life cut short and I'm not going to force your hand. I will live on and I will run as far away as I need to in order to do so." Hamazura stretched out his hand and lightly tapped the armor of the damaged anti-aircraft gun. "So believe in me just this once. Don't give up. What we hold within ourselves is not something cheap enough to just abandon because of a war."

Hamazura thought he heard someone say "sorry" from within the anti-aircraft gun.

He thought he heard it, but he acted as if he hadn't because that was not a situation in which Digurv or Glickin should be apologizing.

He then looked over towards Acqua of the Back.

"I forgot to say something."

"What?"

"Thanks. If you hadn't shown up, the villagers, the girl I've fallen for, and I would have been killed. …I'll return the favor someday."

He didn't have time to wait for the man to respond. The Academy City force would soon occupy that village and seal off the traffic network. He had to retrieve Takitsubo from the village and get out of there before that happened.

Hamazura left Acqua and brought the anti-aircraft gun near the village where he got out of the steel vehicle and ran along the snow. The villagers were not in the destroyed buildings. They had evacuated to the forest to the south. Hamazura hurried in that direction.

It felt like an invisible pressure was pushing him on from behind. He tripped and fell multiple times on the way, but he still headed as quickly as he could to the forest.

When he arrived, he heard many stifled breaths. He caught glimpses of people hiding behind the trees. They were the villagers. When they realized the person rushing in was Hamazura, they rushed out. Someone yelled something in Russian and a mother with a small child came over toward him. She was holding Takitsubo Rikou's limp form in her arms.

"Are you okay, Takitsubo?"

"Hamazura, I'm glad you're safe."

"Sorry. Everything's gotten to be a real pain in the ass again."

He explained the situation to Takitsubo who frowned and slowly moved her lips as sweat dripped down her face.

"…The Elizalina Alliance."

"What?"

"Russia is being invaded by Academy City. At this rate, we will not be able to escape the Academy City bases and their patrols. But Academy City will lose any pretext on which to invade if we leave the country."

It was true that the border with the Elizalina Alliance was supposed to be nearby. It was a land border, so its defenses wouldn't be too strict. They had no choice but to attempt to get through. They would use the national border to avoid Academy City's pursuit and then reenter Russia to search for something to negotiate with.

Now that they had a plan, they couldn't just wait around.

Carrying Takitsubo because she could not walk very well on her own, Hamazura headed back out along the snow. It was probably a few kilometers…no, a few dozen kilometers to the border.

That was when a short old man from the village tossed something silver and shining toward Hamazura.

He hurriedly caught it and realized it was a car key.

The old man said something in Russian with a smile and Takitsubo translated.

“He says this is the key to a blue four wheel drive car parked outside the village.”

“No, I can’t do that,” Hamazura said hesitantly. “Academy City is probably after us. If I took this, it would mean you all helped us escape. I don’t know if they’ll protect you if they knew that.”

The old man said something else in Russian.

“He says to just start the engine without the key so it looks like we stole it,” Takitsubo said.

“Just so you know, they could be listening to this conversation with a high power microphone or a Telepath.”

But then, he was up against military vehicles and powered suits. He couldn’t exactly escape from them on foot while carrying someone else.

He returned the key to the old man, but he decided to take him up on his offer and steal the car.

Hamazura headed from the forest to the village and many different people watched him leave. A small girl tried to grab at his clothes, but her mother stopped her. It was the mother who had been chased by the anti-aircraft gun.

Adjusting Takitsubo’s position on his back, Hamazura muttered while hurrying forward as if to shake off the gaze of the villagers.

“…I’m pathetic. In the end, my best option is to give up after only half helping them.”

“It’s okay, Hamazura,” Takitsubo responded while bringing her mouth up to his ear. “Even now, you’re fighting to protect me. So you aren’t pathetic.”

Hamazura continued to run as if pushed on by those words.

His current destination was the Elizalina Alliance.

In order to escape the heavily armed pursuers from Academy City, he first needed to get to that escape car.

Part 3

It was a small room made of stone.

It may have originally been a fortress or something along those lines.

The sight of that building that was a few hundred years old still being used without any preservation work may have seemed odd to someone from Japan where buildings were usually made of wood due to the frequent earthquakes.

The fluorescent lights, the air conditioner, and other everyday items that had been installed later created a sense of the present day that oddly stood out.

The Elizalina Alliance was a new nation that had been created only a few years before.

Because World War III suddenly occurred before they could construct modern military bases, it seemed they had brought radars and other military equipment into already existing buildings so they could be used as makeshift military facilities. That old fortress was one of them. Most of the people moving from door to door were men and women wearing dirty camouflage.

Amid all this was Accelerator.

He had lost to a Level 0 boy on the snowy plains of Russia, but he had been brought to the Elizalina Alliance when he lost consciousness after the battle. It seemed that Level 0 boy had arranged to have the Alliance soldiers take care of him.

“My battery is…not bad now,” Accelerator said as he reached up for the electrode at his neck.

The battery had been worn down in his repeated battles, but he had gotten a chance to recharge it in a resting area. The voltage, amperage, and shape of the plug had been different from in Japan, so he hadn’t been able to just use the device he had. He had managed to charge the battery by taking apart a local adapter and modifying the inside.

Now that Accelerator had his usual battery power back, he spread the few dozen pieces of parchment out on a wooden table.

They were the ones that the Russian army had been using that freight train to transport.

The parchment had occult-like patterns, cursive spells, and other things that looked like they were from a horror movie. He could tell each diagram had been handwritten with an ink that was sticky like wax, but it was all amazingly accurate for having been done with such an analog method. The words seemed to essentially be cursive Latin, but small notes in Russian were added in here and there.

He didn’t know what it all meant.

In fact, he wasn’t even sure if it had any meaning at all.

But Accelerator’s impression upon looking more closely at the pieces of parchment was…

(It’s almost like some kind of manual. I can tell it shows sequential images as if illustrating some sort of process, but…)

A white man who seemed to be wearing a pile of camouflage was staring at the parchment with a somehow meek expression. The soldier’s skin looked even whiter under the fluorescent lights that seemed out of place in the few hundred years old stone building that could be referred to as ruins without exaggeration.

“Do you understand this?” Accelerator asked in Russian.

The soldier’s shoulders jumped at being addressed. It was not simple fear. The

man seemed surprised that Accelerator was speaking in Russian.

His gaze passed over Accelerator from the top of his head to his feet.

“…You’re Japanese, right?”

The white-haired, red-eyed monster lightly stared back at the soldier and responded to the question with a question of his own.

“What race do I look like to you?”

The soldier must have seen a dangerous irritation in those red eyes because he did not digress any further. To make absolutely sure, Accelerator asked his question again as he carefully pointed towards the parchment.

“Do you understand this?”

“No…” The soldier shook his head. “It looks like a list of magic conversion requirements, though. I think its saying what to replace and with what in order to activate a Roman Catholic spell under Russian Orthodox standards. I don’t know what kind of spell its talking about, though.”

“…”

Accelerator looked puzzled, but the soldier paled and shook his head. He seemed to be saying not to expect anything more from him. A number of male and female soldiers were rushing around. Accelerator and the soldier were the only ones staying put.

The soldier continued speaking.

“Don’t look at me like that. Unlike Lady Elizalina, I don’t know too much about this kind of thing. As her bodyguard, I’ve caught glimpses of it here and there, but I’ve never been taught the basics. If I could chant a spell and have flames shoot from my palm…well, I wouldn’t be carrying around these grenades, would I?”

The man seemed to mistakenly think that Accelerator was upset over not getting a clear answer, but he was frowning for a different reason.

What had that white soldier been saying?

Magic? Spells? A list of conversion requirements? Roman Catholic? Russian Orthodox? Activating spells? This kind of thing? Caught glimpses of it? Taught the basics? Chanting a spell and having flames shoot from his palm?

The soldier had been saying those things as if they were common knowledge, but they were all beyond Accelerator's scope of understanding. It wasn't just some lie he was making up. Nor was he talking about something spiritual or religious. That soldier was listing off those strange terms as if they were techniques that could actually be used in reality. That was clear from the way he had said them. There had been nothing different in his manner of speech from someone discussing the timing with which to pour wine into a pot in order to bring out the flavor of a meat.

Accelerator didn't understand.

But if there existed something that couldn't even be understood by the #1 monster of Academy City, that crystallization of scientific technology, then it might very well be the key to dealing with Last Order's seemingly unsolvable problem.

Aiwass had told him to go to Russia.

And that Level 0 boy had left him that memo saying "Index Librorum Prohibitorum".

Those keys were all connected.

"…Who is this Elizalina?"

"She's a magician…no, a sorcerer. Apparently, that's what you call a magic user who focuses more on raising the next generation than on herself. If the Anglican Church knew, it seems they would send some fearsome hunting dogs after her. Lady Elizalina was the driving force behind readjusting the religious base of the Alliance and successfully training and producing magicians who can actually fight. Well, it's still not enough to directly take on one of the three major denominations like the Russian Orthodox Church, but it's at least enough to construct a defensive line to reflect distant curses. That's the bare minimum towards being able to call ourselves a nation that has a mature cultural history

from a spiritual standpoint.”

Accelerator was thinking that the man would be easier to understand if he were speaking in a programming language. They had passed the point where a mere difference in culture was enough to explain it.

“Anyway, can this Elizalina decipher these parchments?”

“If she can speak,” the soldier said with a sigh. “But she’s on a bed in a field hospital right now.”

“Tch. I was brought here without my consent and then my last hope of getting an explanation is moaning in pain in a hospital room.”

“Is that girl okay?” asked the soldier talking about Last Order.

The girl who appeared to be around 10 was lying atop a sofa at the wall of the same room. Last Order’s limp body did not stir. She was completely unconscious. Recalling how no “presence” of a human could be felt from her, Accelerator felt a coldness from her stillness.

“Does she look okay? I fled the country holding her in my arms because of this.”

“Then you really shouldn’t move her now,” said the white soldier as he looked between Accelerator and Last Order’s faces. “If you’re going to be moving around from now in, it would be bad to be carrying her around with you, right? It may not be much compared to Academy City technology, but it might be better for her to stay in our hospital. Just having a bed can make a huge difference.”

“…I have no intention of staying for long or getting into a fight. It would be best if this ended up being my ultimate destination and everything could be resolved here so that brat was back to her horribly cheerful self.” Accelerator scratched at his head and then asked a question as if he had just remembered something. “Is there anyone other than Elizalina who can decipher the parchments?”

“…Our magicians were trained on the assumption that they would only be used in battles here, so they don’t have much traditional knowledge. Deciphering something like that would be difficult for anyone other than Lady Elizalina.”

That meant he had no choice but to wait for the injured woman to come to.

He could always leave the Alliance and search for some other lead, but the white soldier was right. Last Order's condition was unpredictable. She wasn't in a state where he could be dragging her all over the place with no clear goal.

(…Even if I am gaining something from it, I never thought the day would come when I would be clearing my schedule for someone else.)

"When is this sleeping beauty of yours going to wake up?"

"If things go well, in a few more hours. The general anesthesia should be worn off by then. …But she just got out of surgery. Just reading the text will be the limit for her. She's supposed to be getting complete bed rest, so even that would preferably be avoided."

"I see."

"What about the girl? If you want a bed for her, you should ask for one sooner rather than later. You headed across Eurasia, so you should know. We're in a war here. There's no guarantee that there will always be an open bed."

"…It's true that carrying her around while fighting is rather stupid. Given her condition, it may very well be better to throw her in a hospital. But…"

Suddenly, Accelerator pulled a handgun out from his belt and shot out the legs of a different nearby soldier.

The white soldier was unable to react to the sudden action by the person he had just been speaking with.

Meanwhile, Accelerator shot out the legs of two or three more men and women within the room.

"They were spies," Accelerator said languidly. "If I'm gonna leave that brat somewhere, I need to make sure it's a nice clean environment."

Accelerator lightly kicked the first man he had shot who had collapsed unmoving to the floor. A tiny microphone similar to what a performer would use fell from his clothes and it was connected by a cable to a medium for recording and transmitting. The actions of the Elizalina forces were being monitored by the Russians. Or perhaps, they were using advice and false information to lead the

Alliance astray.

The white soldier hurriedly checked the pockets of the others Accelerator had injured. Similar devices were found hidden on them.

“The range of those transmitters is low. Most likely another spy has a real transmitter outside.”

“Of course, he’ll be on the run after noticing this commotion. Or perhaps he’ll take suicidal action ‘for Russia’.”

Accelerator used his cane to head for the exit to the room.

“I’ll pay for my stay by making a sweep. I don’t have time to go over the entire 300 km stretch of the Alliance, but I’ll exterminate all of the vermin near this plaza. And I’ll give you all a lecture on finding this kind of vermin. You can do the rest on your own.”

“How did you know? There are two different kinds of spies. The first are the ones using the power of a large organization like the KGB or the CIA. The second are those who have no name for themselves and belong to no organization but end up taking on jobs that cause international problems when left with public records. These are clearly the latter. That’s beyond the level that a Japanese teenager should be able to detect.”

“Not necessarily. If you watch for small characteristics and actions, they stand out from everyone else allowing you to naturally find them,” Accelerator responded off hand.

The white soldier shuddered at how casually the boy spoke about it.

“This place you stand in is not the only hell. If you ask me, this level of darkness is still rather bland.”

It soon became clear whether that was a bluff or not.

That monster who did nothing but exterminate the darkness amid cutting edge technology and great evil was now working to prepare that area for Last Order’s stay.

Part 4

A girl's voice flowed smoothly within St. George's Cathedral in London.

"Chapter 8, Verse 25. Beginning elimination of the person obstructing the remote viewing. Analyzing the structure of the enemy's spell."

The noise as if from a scratched record was now gone.

And with a great wind, red wings grew from the back of the girl in the white nun's habit. Their color resembled blood more than fire. As complex magic circles flickered within her pupils, she slowly moved her head around viewing her surroundings.

She was Index.

Seeing that her manner had completely changed, Stiyl Magnus frowned slightly. He would burn enemy magicians to ashes without his expression changing even slightly, but those slight wrinkles appeared on his face because he could not completely suppress the pain within him.

"M T W O T F F T O. (One of the five great elements from which the world is constructed.) I I G O I I O F. (The great flame of the beginning.)"

Even so, Stiyl did not fail to take action.

He had been entrusted with her life.

He pulled out a single rune card.

"I I B O L A I I A O E. (It is a light of blessing that raises life and a light of judgement that punishes evil.) I I M H A I I B O D. (It is overflowing with calm

blessings and with freezing misfortune that destroys cold darkness.) I I N F I I M S. (Its name is fire and its role is the sword.) I C R M M B G P!! (Be manifested and become the power that eats into my body!!)”

No, it was not just a single card.

There were cards stuck to seemingly every single spot in the room. It was to such an extent that it seemed odd that no one had noticed them up to that point.

Flames swirled.

A mass of exploding flame exceeding 3 meters in height appeared. It was in the form of a person. The mass of flames that burned at 3000 degrees Celsius was named Innocentius.

Index’s head moved slightly to ascertain her target.

Immediately afterwards, a great noise exploded out and Innocentius had already been blown away.

The girl had swung the red wings growing from her back. With that alone, the giant god of flames was instantaneously ripped apart despite being supported by thousands of cards. It did not even have the chance to carry out its automatic regeneration. The burden received by Innocentius reversed the flow of energy and burned the cards black making them useless.

That was the power of the grimoire library Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

By freely wielding the 103,000 grimoires, she became the strongest defense mechanism for protecting that treasure trove of knowledge from those who would usurp it.

However, Stiyl did not have time to calmly analyze all that.

When Innocentius was blown away, it scattered in all directions and the explosive wind bared its fangs towards Innocentius’s user.

“…!?”

He was knocked straight to the wall.

With that great shock to his back, even his breathing stopped. The girl with magic circles hidden in her eyes calmly watched on.

“Chapter 10, Verse 3. Effects of the current spell confirmed. Extending the power and range in order to end the life functions of the enemy element has been determined to be the most effective method.”

Multiple red wings stretched out all at once.

The wings had grown large enough that they grazed the ceiling of the cathedral as they rushed towards Stiyl like a closing bear trap.

He had no time to think of a spell.

Stiyl forced his body to move despite having been weakened from the previous blow. He rolled along the floor.

The multiple wings soared down.

There was nothing beyond luck to explain how he was not hit.

But the floor of St. George’s Cathedral broke with a loud crumbling noise.

The stone footing, Stiyl Magnus, and everything else there were swallowed up by the earth.

He didn’t have time to think about bracing for his landing.

The taste of blood mixed in with his breaths.

Stiyl had landed face up and it took a few seconds for him to finally realize where he had landed.

He was in the underground spiritual item vault.

Index’s strike had damaged the very foundation at the base of the construction of the cathedral.

(…Ghah. Dammit. There are tons of defensive walls prepared here. She just caused a part of the anti-magician headquarters to collapse!!)

She was the defense mechanism developed to prevent her tremendous techniques and knowledge from entering the hands of global magic cabals.

Thinking you could take her on 10,000 to 1 was still being naïve.

Taking her on 1 to 1 was just plain stupid.

Fighting her when she was in John's Pen mode was like trying to hold back an entire war.

Before, the Saint known as Kanzaki Kaori and the Imagine Breaker known as Kamijou Touma had been there.

But this time was different.

He could not rely on those kinds of irregulars.

He heard a noise coming from directly above him.

As he stared up from his face-up position, he saw a small girl looking down over the edge of the crumbled hole.

Her lips moved.

"Chapter 11, Verse 2. An effective level of destructive power has been confirmed. A shower of repeated attacks that do not give the enemy time to recover has been determined to be the best strategy."

The grimoire library jumped down without hesitation from that cliff-like height.

Stiyl rolled to the side with all his strength.

Immediately afterwards, Index's feet mercilessly crushed the spot he had been in a moment before.

Part 5

He stomped on the accelerator so hard he thought it would break.

Hamazura Shiage desperately made slight adjustments of the wheel of the four wheel drive car to ensure he did not lose control on the snow. The car had studded tires that were not allowed inside Japan, but the snow was piled up so high that the car still skidded to the side.

Why was he continuing to drive despite that danger?

The answer was reflected in the rearview mirror.

“Fuck!! I can’t even get a chance to pull away from them!!” Hamazura yelled while gritting his teeth.

Academy City powered suits were closing in on him from 50 meters behind the car. Those monstrous mechanical suits were approaching at high speed in a team of 5 that looked like the protagonist team to a super sentai show. They slid along as if on skates, jumped in a way that resembled a triple jump, and otherwise accurately pursued Hamazura and Takitsubo. The two of them had not been able to safely escape the surrounding forces. The enemy forces had enough leeway to send five troops after a single car. Hamazura had taken them lightly.

But even so, he hadn’t been foolish enough to just take them on.

He would have been killed in an instant in a fight with even one of those things. Against five of them, he would be killed in a fifth of an instant. Hamazura didn’t know if that was a good way of expressing it, but he couldn’t come up with a better term.

Takitsubo spoke to him from the passenger seat where she had her seatbelt properly buckled. She had a map on her lap.

“Hamazura, they’re getting closer bit by bit.”

“I know that!! Dammit. They’re all chasing after us like they’re ice skating or something!! The exhibition of that kind of unreserved tech didn’t bring about more weird urban legends, did it!?”

“The border of the Elizalina Alliance is about 500 meters away. Can we make it?”

He didn’t have time to respond.

He had barely been keeping the car under control up to that point and it had finally started to skid to the side. Hamazura frantically spun the wheel in an attempt to recover, but the car swerved off the road that had no fence or guardrail and straight into a forest.

He couldn’t hit the brake.

If he didn’t continue to step on the gas, the powered suits would catch up.

As the scenery changed, the speed at which he seemed to experience things suddenly increased.

Trees thicker than telephone poles slipped past both sides of the car at terrifying speeds.

(500 meters…)

The powered suits did not care.

Despite cutting through the forest at about the same speed as Hamazura and Takitsubo, they unhesitatingly approached as if they were running atop a safe roller coaster track. They didn’t just head along the snow-covered ground. They would occasionally take daring shortcuts by kicking off of the branches or trunks of the thick trees. It wasn’t just their strength that was being increased by the machine. The suits’ sensors to take in information and the processors that heightened their thought and decision-making processes were above anything Hamazura had ever seen before. They may have had electrodes attached that directly influenced the workings of their brains.

(500 meters!!)

The car floated up in to the air.

The forest was not flat like the asphalt road.

A slight rise in the ground acted as a jump that sent the four wheel drive car souring into the air.

“Oh, shi—!?”

The tires touched down again before he could finish swearing.

The car skidded much more than it had before. He frantically operated the wheel, but the car turned 90 degrees to the side in no time at all.

But luck was on Hamazura’s side.

At that same time, the car slid out of the forest and back onto a snowy plain.

The border with the Elizalina Alliance was ahead.

A 2 meter chain-link fence with barbed wire was set up between the countries, but Hamazura just ignored it. If he tried to regain control, it would just lead to losing time.

(We just need to slide on through!!)

They plowed through the fence while still facing to the side.

The powered suit’s thick fingertips just barely missed them.

The car was wrapped up in the chain-link fence and the driver side window shattered loudly. The car continued on into the Elizalina Alliance. The remains of the fence must have been chewing at the front wheels because an odd noise reverberated up. Shortly thereafter, Hamazura completely lost control of the car. The car spun around three times and finally came to a stop pointed towards the Russian border.

They had escaped.

They were only about 20 meters into the Elizalina Alliance, but they were inside it nonetheless. The powered suits…or more accurately, Academy City’s forces,

were officially at war with Russia so they could not enter the Elizalina Alliance.

But…

“You’re kidding…” Hamazura moaned from the driver seat.

The powered suits that were supposed to be unable to touch them relentlessly walked forward.

He doubted they had not noticed the border.

They knew it was there, but they were ignoring it.

One of the machine’s hands was gripping something.

It was a much too large revolver. A can of coffee could easily fit inside the barrel. It probably fired grenades or something like that. If it was actually a shotgun, Hamazura couldn’t even imagine how much destructive force it would hold. Either way, the car had no bulletproofing, so it would become a ball of fire after a single shot.

The barrel unhesitatingly pointed their way.

No voice called out a threat or a warning.

Hamazura’s gaze moved to the doorknob on the driver side door, but the remains of the fence were wrapped around the door preventing him from opening it even if he tried.

(I forgot.)

Hamazura thought to himself while staring blankly into that barrel that looked like a tunnel to death.

He was not playing a sport.

It was not a card game.

It was a real battle.

If the weak or the loser yelled out about a violation of the rules, no one would

come to fix the problem. With all the time he had spent running around in back alleys, he should have known that well.

He didn't even notice how dry his throat was.

The powered suit's thick finger that was on the trigger of the giant revolver moved.

And then Hamazura heard what sounded like a firework being fired. It was not the explosive noise of the firework blooming into a large flower. It was the sound made when the firework was fired up into the sky from the ground.

He frowned.

He didn't have time to figure out which direction the noise had come from.

Immediately afterwards, a line of flames erupted along the border including where the powered suits were.

The scene looked like some kind of joke.

It was not a usual explosion where the flames spread in every direction. The flames spread out unnaturally like a line had been drawn with oil. The flames were 10 meters high and they stretched for four or five hundred meters. The windshield shattered. They were a fair distance away, but the intense light and heat were blown against Hamazura and Takitsubo's faces. He could feel the car that was stopped atop the snow sliding a few centimeters back due to the shockwave.

"What?" Hamazura made sure his throat still worked and then spoke to Takitsubo who was in the passenger seat. "Napalm…?"

"From the sound just before…it seems it was a rocket with a liquid explosive inside."

Takitsubo's breathing sounded faint.

But she was still alive.

Hamazura didn't know what had happened or who had done it, but he decided

they should at least get out of the now-useless car and hide within the Elizalina Alliance.

But then a loud noise exploded out.

It was the sound of metal being crushed.

Someone was standing atop the hood of the car. Hamazura couldn't believe it, but it was almost like the person had fallen from the sky and landed there.

From the driver seat he could only see slender legs.

As he could see the person's heels, the person must have been staring at the wall of flames from the liquid explosive.

A number of powered suits squirmed within the flames.

Even in that much fire, the powered suits were still functioning properly. They looked at the person standing on top of the hood…and then took a step back. Hamazura had seen them stop moving for an instant before they took that step. It was as if they had received orders over their radios. The powered suits continued through to the other side of the flames and left.

It seemed the person standing on the hood had saved Hamazura and Takitsubo.

Who was this person?

That question was resolved quickly.

The person whose heels were pointed their way used one of those heels to lightly scrape at the edge of the broken windshield. At least, that was all it looked like the person had done. Immediately afterwards, the car's roof that the heel had scraped against bent and separated from the rest of the car.

With a tremendous noise, Hamazura's view greatly opened up all at once.

The person standing before him was a monster with white hair and red eyes.

Hamazura Shiage recognized him.

That monster was…

“Accelerator…!?”

“Tch. Don’t bring in more fucking problems while I’m trying to find spies that are already here,” the monster said sounding irritated to the bottom of his heart. “Tell me absolutely everything.”

Part 6

“Fine then,” a blonde-haired blue-eyed woman said in Japanese within a field hospital that was really just an old stone fortress that medical equipment had been brought into.

The woman sitting up in a bed had bandages wrapped around her. However, her body did not look as if it would be fine even without them. Her skin was more pale than it was white, she had large shadows under her eyes, and she was so slim that the lines of her bones could be seen. She looked like she might turn into quite a beauty if she were fed chankonabe for half a year straight.

She was Elizalina, the women for whom the alliance was named.

With a melancholy attitude, she held her head in her slim hands.

“If I have a chance to use recovery magic, I would really rather use it on myself first, though.”

“Oh, sorry.”

“There is no need to lower your head to me. It’s just that I was forced into emergency surgery by my aide despite having said I did not need to rest.”

It seemed she had taken damage, but that she was going to help Takitsubo.

Hamazura was truly thankful, but he was also confused.

What was “recovery magic”?

At first, he thought she must have gotten the Japanese word for what she was trying to say wrong, but she clearly seemed to know more Japanese than an idiot like him. That meant she had said what she meant, but…what did she mean?

He looked over toward Accelerator who only clicked his tongue and averted his gaze.

Hamazura had heard from him that the Elizalina Alliance might have some kind of special medical techniques that did not even exist in Academy City. It wasn’t clear if they would be able to alleviate Takitsubo’s symptoms, but he had decided it was worth looking into and had headed for the field hospital carrying Takitsubo.

(Recovery? She said recovery magic, right? Like in RPGs? Or is it some medical term? Recovery makes sense in that context, but how does magic fit in?)

Hamazura’s head was full of questions, but Elizalina had spoken about it so readily and smoothly that he didn’t voice his questions. It was a method that worked for swindlers, too. Just by rattling off words without giving the other person a word in edgewise could leave them thinking there was some level of sense behind it.

Elizalina ignored Hamazura and turned her head in a different direction.

She was looking at Takitsubo who was just barely managing to sit in a small chair and at a girl who appeared to be around 10 who was lying in a bed. She had been referred to with the extremely odd name of Last Order, and Hamazura wondered if it was some kind of esper name.

“I have come to the following conclusion.” From atop her bed, Elizalina pointed to Takitsubo and then Last Order as she spoke. “I can probably manage with that girl in the track suit, but that smaller girl will be more difficult.”

“…”

Accelerator’s eyebrows twitched slightly as he leaned up against the wall.

It seemed Last Order had been brought there by the #1.

Hearing Elizalina's calm or perhaps cruel statement, Hamazura's eyes widened in surprise.

"Ah…eh? What do you mean when you say you can manage?"

"Is the word magic not enough for you to understand?"

"Hah?"

"Is the word magic not enough for you to understand?" Elizalina repeated herself.

It seemed she was not going to let things continue without some kind of reaction from him, so Hamazura just nodded.

What was all this about magic?

"Let's set aside the issue of whether it actually exists or not," she said casually avoiding the core of the issue. "I'm sure you know that witches and the like have carried out occult rituals since ancient times. Whether those rituals have any real effects or not, there was a time when that kind of thing was believed in and those rituals were carried out using certain processes."

"What? You mean those hook-nosed old women stirring giant pots?"

"Those rituals used certain types of medicinal plants that are similar to what are known as narcotics today and toxins taken from certain animals."

"??? Wait a second. What does this have to do with what's wrong with Takitsubo?"

Takitsubo's illness was caused by the Body Crystal created by Academy City's scientific technology. Hamazura didn't think a clue to healing her lay in strange occult curses.

"Leaving aside the issue of whether those things were mere illusions or if they truly had effects that overcame physical phenomena," Elizalina said, "methods of safely carrying out those rituals using toxins were passed down orally when

those rituals were prevalent. For instance, there was a method of training one's body to resist the toxins by taking in the toxin bit by bit in order to get used to it. And there was also a method to remove the toxin collected within one's body."

"What…but, what're you…?"

Suddenly Hamazura almost stood up from his chair.

"You mean you can heal her!?"

Elizalina held out a hand to try to calm him down.

"Yes. The girl in the track suit and the smaller girl have different illnesses. The smaller girl is having the toxin constantly poured into her body, so it will be replaced even if I were to remove it now. But the girl in the track suit should be okay once I remove the toxin collected in her body. It will not completely heal her, but she should be much better off than she is now."

Elizalina must have been referring to the Body Crystal.

It was true that removing the Body Crystal from Takitsubo's body would improve her condition by quite a bit even if it did not completely heal her. Hamazura wasn't sure how much the hospital could do about Academy City's Body Crystal, but methods of healing that seemed fake would sometimes actually have a scientific basis behind them that could be used as the basis of a new medical technique.

"…I see."

Hope seeped into Hamazura bit by bit.

Without thinking, he embraced Takitsubo who was sitting next to him.

"I see!! Isn't that great, Takitsubo!? It's not quite what we planned, but coming to Russia really was the right decision!"

"Hamazura, I can't breathe."

"Sorry! But I…I...!!"

Takitsubo kept saying she was having trouble breathing from his tight embrace, but she brushed her cheek on his back when she saw the tears welling up in his eyes.

"…"

Meanwhile, Academy City's strongest Level 5 silently folded his arms as he leaned against the wall.

He hadn't found a way to save Last Order there.

If the same thing had happened just a few hours before, he would likely have felt an intense impatience and fear burning inside him. He might have settled for hopeless struggling in an attempt to remove Last Order's pain even an instant sooner.

Something seemed to be changing within him bit by bit.

It was like iron changing to steel by being intensely heated and then rapidly cooled.

(…Yelling out and stomping around isn't going to help the situation. At any rate, I know I don't have much time. I can't waste time on a dead end. If I use more time than I gain from this stopgap measure, I'll be cornered in the end.)

Having made that quick decision, Accelerator pulled the pieces of parchment from his pocket.

"You can go with that plan for healing them, but answer my question first. Can you read this?"

"If I spent time on it, I might be able to." Elizalina nodded slightly. "The strings of characters on the surface are nothing more than a help for deciphering it. From what I can see, it looks to be in a Russian Orthodox format, so I could likely solve it. However, it would take time. Do you still wish to leave this with me?"

"No." Accelerator lightly lifted his hand with the parchments in it as if taking them back. "I just needed to know that it could be 'solved'. You focus on healing those two."

“Ah…”

Hamazura opened his mouth to speak after listening to all that, but he couldn’t come up with anything to say.

Accelerator gave a scornful laugh. Hamazura felt that the other boy might have felt as if Hamazura’s own joy at Takitsubo being able to be saved was like rubbing salt in the wound because the girl with him could not.

“I don’t have much time. I’ll be going.”

Accelerator headed for the door with his cane and Elizalina asked him a question while Hamazura was still at a loss for words.

“Do you think you’ve found a lead?”

“If I haven’t, I’ll go look for one.”

Accelerator left the hospital room and called over a soldier who was walking down the hall. That hospital was not a peaceful medical facility. It was just a fortress being used for military purposes that had medical equipment brought in. It was more of a military facility than a medical one.

“Where are the spies I caught?”

“Th-they’re being interrogated, but it isn’t going well. We aren’t experts at getting people to talk and the Russian spies were divided into small cells for each job, so they may not know any more information than they needed to.”

“I see,” Accelerator replied bluntly to the withering soldier.

“Where are you headed? If you want to watch on, I can show you the way.”

“No.” Accelerator waved the man away with a hand. “I’m going to follow up on a better source of information.”

The soldier frowned, but Accelerator had no reason to explain further.

Leaving the soldier behind, he walked along the long hallway to a different

hospital room from the one Elizalina was in. He opened the door without knocking.

Inside was someone who it was surprising was not restrained.

He might really have been influenced by that Level 0.

"…Misaka Worst," Accelerator muttered and the high school-aged girl sitting on the bed glared back at him with contempt.

She was a special clone created in the project known as the Third Season based on the cells from the #3 Level 5.

The girl was wearing a white battle outfit, but her right arm was wrapped in a cast and hanging from a strap. In their battle, Accelerator had broken that arm after he had snapped. She also had a large amount of gauze stuck from behind her ears to the back of her neck.

They were enemies.

It would not be surprising if either of them stabbed a blade into the other's heart without a word of warning.

"What do you want?"

Misaka Worst moved her skin just a few millimeters and created an expression that would make anyone uncomfortable.

She seemed to be prepared anew.

"Even if you saved Misaka back then, her only value is for information. But unfortunately for you, Misaka does not have the ability to just tell you everything. It should be clear what would happen if she did. Although, Misaka supposes you have pretty good taste if you're going to destroy her anew right after healing her."

"Work together with me."

"For what? Why? How?"

“I found a few Russian listening devices. The spies will be giving all sorts of information and I want you to sort through that information. With your knowledge, you might be able to find a clue.”

“What’s your basis for thinking this?”

“The timing of your attack.” Accelerator lightly waved the rolled up parchments. “It was right when I was about to ask that Vodyanoy person about the details of these parchments. The timing of your arrival seemed intentional. You may not know the details yourself, but you were probably used in order to prevent me from finding some clue. If we compare the information you have and the information from the Russian spies, we might find something.”

“No, not that. What’s your basis for thinking Misaka will work with you?”

Misaka Worst grinned.

Her words intentionally brought the possibility of danger on herself. Perhaps someone who viewed the world through spiteful eyes did not hesitate even when it meant bringing injury to herself.

But Accelerator responded without any change in expression.

“The Third Season is not going to be the winner in this. I’m sure you aren’t stupid enough to think it is.”

“…”

“It seems Academy City wants to use the Misaka Network to do something. A problem occurred with that network, so they needed to set up a new network. That is why you were sent to kill that brat and me. …But guess what. I don’t know if tens of thousands of clones are supposed to be created for the Third Season, but the fate of you and the new network will be the same. You’ll either be used up for someone’s profit or you won’t be able to carry out your purpose and another network will be set up in your place. Either way, it’s a dead end. This is about the values of people who applaud the deaths of 20,000 people as a success. I’m sure you know that you won’t be used in any good way.”

“And you’re saying Misaka should work with you because of that?” Misaka Worst laughed scornfully. “Are you going to join hands with someone who is in

the middle of all that evil?”

“You were made to pick up the negative emotions such as spite and hatred from the network, right?”

“And?”

“Does that fucking dark brain of yours really possess anything as admirable as devotion until death to your masters who see you as expendable? I’ve heard that brat saying she wasn’t going to let even one more clone die.”

“Even if that’s so, Misaka doesn’t think that obeying you will resolve that issue. In fact, joining with you would only shorten her lifespan.”

“I see. Then it’s time to make a deal.”

“Hah?”

“The Dark May Project.”

“You don’t mean…?”

“That project attempted to use my method of controlling my power to strengthen other espers’ personal realities. It seems they had a certain level of success, but it didn’t lead them to a Level 5. The only way to make you irreplaceable is for you to gain an ability that the other Sisters do not have. What’ll you do? If you analyze how I fight, you might be able to find a way out.”

“…”

There were a few seconds of silence.

That time was not taken up by her thinking.

She did not mind losing her life.

The way she had spoken before made that clear.

What would make up her mind was whether it sounded fun or not. Was doing it really worth turning her back on the large organization of Academy City?

In other words, she was testing the flavor.

She rolled a mass of spite around in her mouth seeing if the taste of it was appropriate for her or not.

And then she smiled.

Misaka Worst once again began acting out of spite as she had been created to do.

“Ah, ha. …That is very much like this Misaka. That may be more effective than bringing out an expression of suffering on that lovely command tower’s face and appealing to your good will and philanthropy.”

“I will find a clue to getting rid of that brat’s illness. I will find a route for you other than to just be used up. That is why I will fight Academy City. I will outsmart them. Our interests are aligned, so quit complaining and get to work.”

“But y’know…” Misaka Worst stood up from the bed and lightly waved her right arm from the elbow because it was in a cast. “Misaka was modified solely to kill Academy City’s #1, so she never thought the day would come when she would be forcing a smile after having all that done to her.”

That kind of spiteful comment was a special characteristic of hers because she was made to easily display the negative emotions from the network. Even if it wasn’t intentional, it still rubbed Accelerator the wrong way. It especially affected him because it had likely been designed to do just that.

Accelerator stared at Misaka Worst’s cast and muttered a few words while barely moving his mouth.

“…Sorry. That was my mistake because I went along with their manipulation.”

For an instant, Misaka Worst’s spite-covered face turned to a blank expression. It was the expression of someone whose thoughts had ground to a halt.

“Bah hyah.”

And then Misaka Worst rolled back onto the bed she had just stood up from.

“Ah hya hya hya hya!! What was that!? What was thaaaat!? Misaka’s body was

prepared and especially tuned to be sent to the battlefield!! You need to at least be a target of hate standing at the very peak of evil! If you show her that meek expression, her whole reason for existing starts to slip away!! Hya hya hya hya hya!!"

"…Fuck being a villain," Accelerator spat out as Misaka Worst held her stomach and kicked her legs around. "I wasn't able to ensure the safety of a single kid while being a master villain. I no longer have any reason to stay fixated on that."

Neither that Level 0 nor the monster known as Aiwass had been fixated on being either good or evil. When fighting against an opponent like that, simply choosing a side was not enough.

Misaka Worst had tears in her eyes and she asked a question in an oddly satisfied voice.

"Where is a monster that was so utterly stained supposed to go after leaving the field of darkness?"

"Don't ask me. That's what I'm going to look for now," Accelerator responded sounding annoyed. "Both you and I are monsters purposefully set to be filled with evil by Academy City. I don't think that is enough to just abdicate all responsibility for what I've done and nor do I want it to be. They made the preparations and we went along with it. By heading along the path of evil, we can't oppose them. That's just continuing right along the track they've laid out for us."

"…"

"So let's make them cry this time. Let's truly fight back. I've had enough of being manipulated by them. I don't care if I end up doing things that aren't like me for this."

Accelerator then gently stretched out the hand that was not holding his cane.

It was like he was asking for a handshake from a war buddy who had watched his back.

"Please."

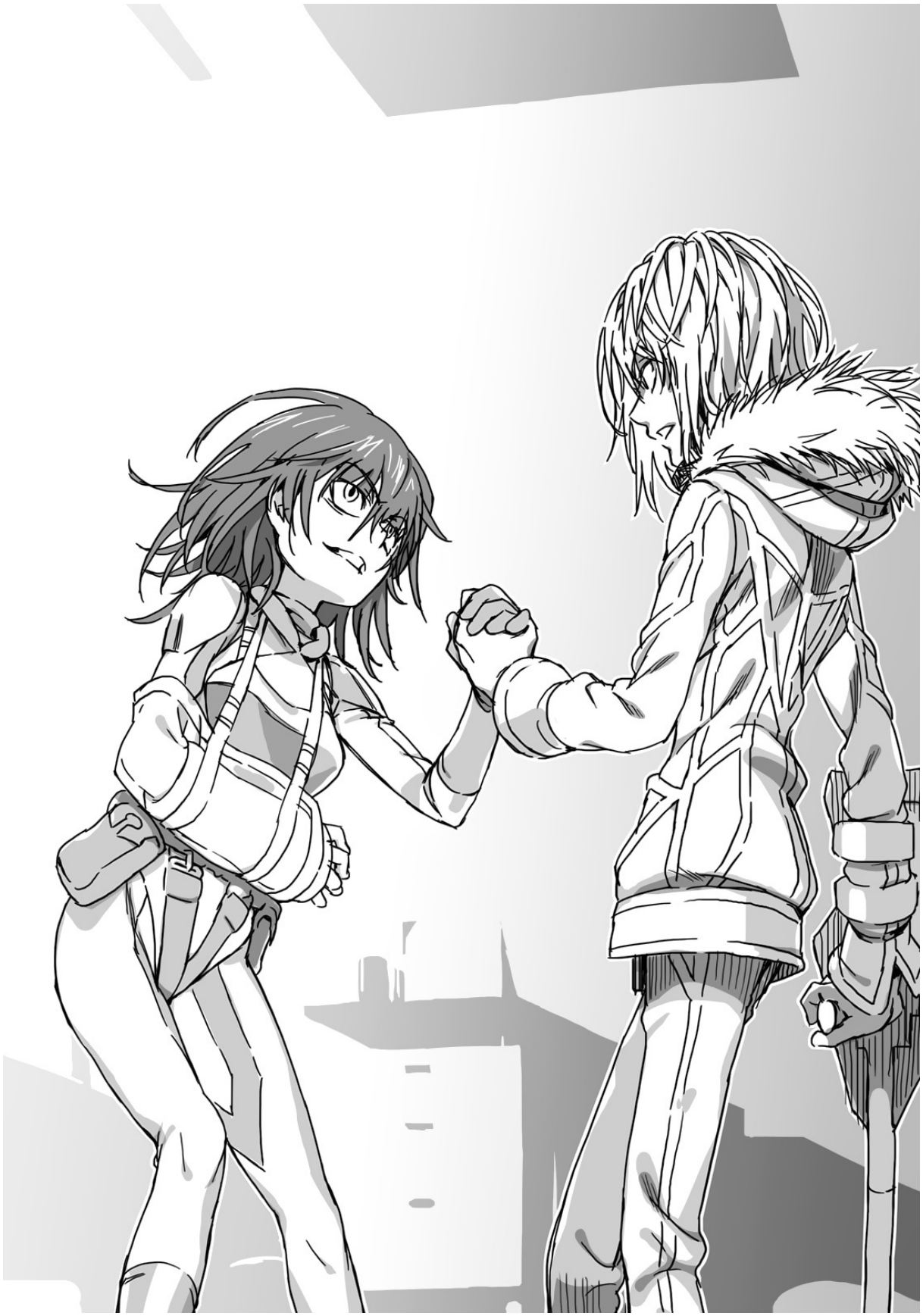
In that instant, Misaka Worst sank into silence as if time had stopped.

But it only lasted a few seconds.

As if she couldn’t hold back her true self, Misaka Worst once again began holding her stomach and kicking her legs around atop the bed with tears in her eyes.

“Hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya!! Are you an idiot? Are you an iiiidiot!? Oh, wow! Look at that stupid serious look!! Ah hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya!!”

As Misaka Worst rolled around on the bed, she laughed so hard that she seriously thought her diaphragm was going to break.



But she finally rolled up in a ball and then sat up all at once.

She tightly gripped the outstretched hand.

A nice sentimental-feeling sound like a glove catching a baseball rang throughout the hospital room.

For someone as filled with spite as her, grasping someone's hand like that must have taken quite a bit of resolution. But Misaka Worst had overcome it. That handshake between enemies who had once tried to take each other's life was proof of that.

Misaka Worst stood up with their hands still clasped like a lady being escorted. She grinned with a mischievous smile and spoke to the person who had once been her archenemy.

"This is the first time for Misaka to grasp someone's hand like this, but it is for you too, isn't it?"

"…No," Accelerator muttered quietly averting his gaze a bit. "I've done it quite a few times with a horrible brat who looks an awful lot like you."

Reminded of the touch of a certain girl from the feel of that hand, he once again set his resolve.

That was not the end.

He would hold that girl's hand once more.

He would make sure of it.

Chapter 6: The True Darkness Unfolds.
Up_the_Castle.

Part 1

There was nothing around him.

The area was just a snowy plain in the first place, but the area around Fiamma's base had been thoroughly rid of any kind of cover. There were no manmade constructions or even any trees. On that gently-sloping plain, anyone approaching would be quickly spotted and missiles were prepared to fire on them.

Just past the effective range of that wall of firepower, Kamijou Touma looked along the ground that was buried in white snow.

There was a large hole.

The land had originally looked like a low hill, but the opening to a cave about 2 meters across opened up on the side of the slope. The cave did not head straight. It continued down.

"…So it *is* here," he muttered half in shock. "Are there just secret bases all over the place or something?"

"What are you talking about? Japan's Academy City is the same. It wouldn't surprise me to see a lake split open and a giant robot to come out in that city,"

Lessar responded offhand as she passed by Kamijou and headed down into the cave.

The cave was covered by snow on all sides and it was not dark. Bare light bulbs were hanging from the walls at set intervals. As they headed deeper in, the size of the tunnel grew bit by bit. After walking 50 meters, they came to a station for a freight train.

But…

"…No one's here."

"The train isn't here either."

At first they had assumed people might be hiding and lying in wait, but they really could not sense any presences within the station, so they entered.

It was a different station from the one they had snuck into before, but it was constructed similarly. The main differences were the lack of the train and the lack of even a single wooden box to be loaded onto a train. The area was lit by a number of light bulbs and it had a weird out-of-place feeling like a house where the residents left and forgot to turn off the lights.

Kamijou crouched down next to the metal rails and pressed his ear to the cold metal.

"There are no vibrations. I don't smell any diesel exhaust either. …It doesn't seem like one is running anywhere nearby."

"It's possible Fiamma's base has already gotten its last shipment of supplies."

"But that means…"

Kamijou and Lessar exchanged unhappy glances.

They were about 40 kilometers from Fiamma's base. If they couldn't sneak aboard a freight train, they had no choice but to walk through the snow cave. Even if it was asphalt below their feet, that distance was far enough that they could be considered stranded.

Lessar adjusted the steel glove on her shoulder.

“Okay, I’ve got it. I have a suggestion.”

“Th-that’s right. You’re a professional magician. Do you have an alternative plan? It would just be too pathetic if we used up all of our energy here and ran into Fiamma with our calves hurting.”

“Carry me.”

“Say that again and I’ll kick your ass.”

As he regretted getting his hopes up, Kamijou looked down the long, long rail.

They really seemed to have no choice but to walk.

In order to force some motivation into himself, he made himself think positively by remembering that it was better than getting blown away by the howitzers defending on the surface.

“Let’s go, Lessar. Or are you going to wait here?”

“Okay, okay. But make sure to remember that your Lessar bravely stayed with you without giving a single complaint.”

Lessar lined up next to Kamijou, but for some reason she flipped the steel glove upside down, balanced it, and straddled the handle like it was a witch’s broomstick. The four blades moved almost like fingers and moved her forward.

Kamijou looked at her like he had spotted a traitor.

“…Lessar, what is that?”

“What do you mean? My steel glove can be used like this, too. It’s a little annoying how it makes everything ride up down there, though. Bayloupe rode around in the London subway tunnels like this, so…ah! Stop, stop!! It won’t work for you! Your right hand will break it to pieces, so just resist and walk on your own!!”

Kamijou and Lessar struggled for a bit, but it did not last long.

However, that was not because Imagine Breaker destroyed the steel glove.

What was destroyed was the path ahead of them.

With an explosive noise, the snow ceiling collapsed.

It happened about 100 meters ahead of them. The thick white ceiling had likely been supported magically, but it suddenly fell straight down like a giant shutter.

In an instant, the passage was blocked off.

And it did not end there.

Explosive noises that felt like they would make their eardrums burst continued on and on.

It was like the feet of an approaching giant were destroying the ceiling of the passageway.

At that rate, they would be caught up in the collapse and buried alive.

“Oh, shit!! We need to get back to the entrance!!”

“You don’t have to tell me that!!”

Kamijou made a right about-face and ran with everything he had. As he did, the passageway and the rail vibrated and the avalanche from the snow ceiling approached threatening to swallow them up. It was like they were being chased by a monstrous maw.

“What!? Did my right hand end up negating the magic supporting the snow!?”

“This might be a wonderful attraction presented to us by Fiamma. It may have been a bad idea to try the same trick twice…!!”

The heavy vibrations continued.

Kamijou and Lessar ran as quickly as they could.

Perhaps due to the approaching cave-in, small balls of ice blew into the air like dust and passed Kamijou and Lessar.

They were going to be caught.

As soon as he thought that, Kamijou made it out of the cave. Next to him, Lessar fell down onto the snow unable to bring an end to her momentum. The only question was whether it was a coincidence that he could see her panties from that angle.

(D-did we make it…?)

Kamijou put his hands on his knees and tried to catch his breath and then reached a hand out toward Lessar who was lying face up in the snow.

But he froze in the middle of that action.

He had realized that the cave-in had not been caused by his right hand negating the magic supporting the snow or by Fiamma blowing up the passageway to prevent them from getting in.

“Dammit…” Kamijou muttered as he heard what sounded like a high-pitched whistle.

The actual cause of the cave-in had been…

“It’s an Academy City bombardment!!”

He grabbed Lessar from the ground and practically swung her around as he put her and himself against the slope of the hill that had held the opening to the cave.

Immediately afterwards, something flashed in the sky that was covered in white snow clouds. It wasn’t just one of whatever it was. There were at least 50 of them. The high-pitched whistle-like sound was the sound of hunks of metal slicing through the air at faster than the speed of sound. The hunks of metal were falling shells. The shells were 15 cm in diameter and about 70 cm long. They were launched up about 500 meters with the power of gunpowder and then accurately guided to their targets with movements of their tails where they would then explode.

Kamijou didn’t have time to think about where they would fall.

They were not aimed at specific smaller targets. Their bombardment was simply

meant to blow away the base itself and all the sensors set up in the area.

The light and noise seemed to overload their senses as Kamijou and Lessar trembled. The light was painful and the noise was like a shockwave. Because of the overwhelmingly bright white flashes, Kamijou couldn't tell if he had his eyes open or closed. Even though the two of them were pressed against the slope of the hill, he could feel Lessar slipping from his grasp. No. Kamijou was lying on top of her and he was the one being blown into the air.

That state lasted for over 30 seconds.

Or perhaps it all only lasted an instant, but the afterimage burned into his senses remained for that long.

"Les…sar…"

His voice was oddly hoarse. He could feel a throbbing pain in his temples like when one stared at a fluorescent light for too long.

He didn't have time to tend to his injured body.

Kamijou heard the sound of heavy treads.

The sickly smell of exhaust mixed in with the scenery.

(An Academy City tank unit…!!)

Ignoring the loss of body heat, Kamijou sank down into the deep snow to hide.

He had smuggled himself into Russia and he would certainly be captured if he was spotted there. To save Index, he couldn't allow himself to be captured.

The sound of treads and smell of exhaust were not coming from just one type of vehicle.

Most likely, small airborne tanks designed to be dropped from transport planes and bombers were in the front and special vehicles armed with longer range missiles and rockets followed. There were also a lot of transport trucks packed with over 20 powered suits each. The unarmed 8-wheel trucks were likely power trucks that supplied electricity for the powered suits and UAVs. The ones with a

large number of antennae might be control vehicles for the unmanned weapons deployed in the area.

A scattered bombardment began from the base in opposition.

It was the Russian army's counter attack.

But Kamijou was uneasy. Academy City's first wave had likely greatly reduced Russia's general force, but if a single one of the explosives being fired landed near Kamijou and Lessar, they would be blown to pieces.

"(This is our chance!!)" Lessar said to Kamijou after sinking down into the snow on the slope along with Kamijou.

Kamijou's eyes widened because he wasn't quite sure what Lessar meant.

"(How is this our chance!? The Russians have started firing, too. This is turning into a tank battle!!)"

"(And we can use that turmoil to sneak into Fiamma's base.)" Lessar was staring at the powered suits that had gotten off the trucks and were beginning to enter the battle. "(Why do you think the Russian army has gone on the defensive like this? It's because Fiamma does not want to move. Either he doesn't want anyone to know he's hiding here or he's carrying out some kind of magical work. At any rate, we can head to the base above ground like this. Now that the underground route has been sealed, this is our only chance.)"

The battle between Academy City and the Russian army began.

Even though it was a few dozen kilometers away, once the base had gotten within range of the weapons, the battle seemed almost over. Normally, a defensive line would be a little farther out. Either Academy City had already taken out the troops of the defensive line or the supersonic bombers had forced the defensive line to quickly fall back.

It was true they might be able to get inside the facility during all that chaos.

"(What exactly are we supposed to do? Even if they're fighting each other, we'll still be spotted and shot if we just head to the base like this.)"

“(We steal a powered suit.)” Lessar grabbed her steel glove in both hands. “(Those things don’t use complicated controls or anything, right? If it just moves matching the movements of your arms and legs, even we can operate them despite not having any training.)”

“(You make that sound easy, but those things are on a level where you need a 30 mm Gatling guns to just barely manage against one of them. My right hand won’t be any help against them. How are we going to take one out?)”

“(I’ll be doing that part.)” Lessar entered a stance like a carnivore with her special weapon in hand. “(I don’t know if they’re aware of how important that base is, but that equipment isn’t enough to win against Fiamma. For some reason, Fiamma doesn’t want to move right now, but he will come out if the base seriously starts losing. If we don’t get in there before that happens, they’ll all be killed.)”

“(…Lessar!!)”

“(If you’re going to praise me, I’d prefer you did it while petting my head in bed.)”

Lessar ignored Kamijou’s voice trying to restrain her and she silently began to take action. She seemed to be aiming for a powered suit that was passing nearby with its back to them, but the machine held a giant shotgun in its hands. It was the anti-shelter weapon Kamijou had seen in Avignon.

Just one shot from that would put a human in a state where they couldn’t even have a proper funeral.

It was as if Lessar were trying to kill a large carnivore with a primitive spear or club. Those kinds of traditional skills may exist, but it still looked incredibly dangerous when he was actually seeing it.

“(…Dammit.)” Kamijou muttered under his breath while still sunken down in the snow.

He had a worry beyond Lessar.

“(There should be magicians as well as the Russian military at Fiamma’s base. When we snuck in before, there were almost 200 Russian Orthodox magicians in

that large room with Fiamma. If they came out, they might be able to overturn Academy City's advantage. Yet there's no sign of them. Are they actually out here and I just can't tell they're there or have they still not come out? If they haven't, why not? I doubt Fiamma would allow that base to fall. Is there any reason to preserve that base in a way that is practically inviting the Academy City forces in?)"

He hadn't been speaking because he expected an answer.

He was merely getting his thoughts in order with words.

And yet…

"Hm? That should be obvious. It's to invite in the person who possesses that important right arm. In other words, you."

He got a response.

Kamijou looked around for the source of the voice in shock. The voice had not come from any direction around him. It had come from within Kamijou's clothes.

"I may have helped start this war, but it would be a problem if I lost that right arm due to a random shell. It would also be a problem if some people decided to kill you just because they know you are important to my plan. To recover you quickly, I purposefully left a hole open."

Kamijou frantically reached inside his jacket and found a small doll made of kneaded flour.

As soon as Kamijou grabbed it with his right hand, it crumbled and was swept away by the cold wind.

"…"

Kamijou had run into Fiamma in the Elizalina Alliance. It had ended in a tie, but Sasha Kreutzev had been taken and the others were fairly beat up, so it had really been mostly a loss for them.

At that time, he had felt Fiamma had left a little too easily.

Fiamma wanted Kamijou's right arm and had overwhelmed them in battle. Yet he had overlooked Kamijou simply because it was inefficient to carry both Sasha and his right arm at the same time.

Fiamma of the Right had surely had a plan worked out at that time. And of course, that cruel message he had left with Kamijou had not been simply out of cruelty.

He had made sure Kamijou would come find him.

And if Kamijou was searching for him, he could always attack the boy.

Attack him accurately and precisely.

(Shit…!!)

Kamijou heard the high-pitched whistle-like sound many times over.

He immediately looked up, but it was already too late.

A great vibration reverberated through the white earth.

It came from below his feet.

Part 2

Sellick G. Kirnov let out a groan.

He wondered where he was.

He was in a dark room.

Sellick's body was bound to a chair in the center of the room. A rectangular frame of light was a short distance away in front of him. It was probably a door.

Light was leaking through the gap around it. That was the only source of light. As there were no windows or lights, he could only see everything around him in silhouette.

A scent that reminded him of iron or possibly blood seemed to put pressure on his chest.

Sellick had a bad feeling of what was to come.

He had an idea where he was.

"…Let's keep this short," said a voice.

He then heard a slight sound from in front of him.

It was the sound of someone placing a wooden chair on the floor and then sitting down in it. With the minimal lighting, Sellick could only see a single red eye staring at him.

"You can be honest or you can lie. I don't care. You can even remain silent. After all, we can see into your head solely from your reaction to my questions. Think of it like an advanced lie detector. This'll all be over soon."

A bluish-white flash filled Sellick's vision for an instant.

He thought it had been a camera flash, but he was wrong.

It was actually a spark from a high-voltage current. It had come from a girl who stood behind the person with the red eyes.

The one with the red eyes pointed back over his shoulder with his thumb.

"She can manipulate electricity. That's the kind of esper she is. You know what an esper is, right? I'm sure they at least broadcast the Daihaseisai here…And I'm sure you would know in your line of business."

"…"

Sweat started pouring from Sellick's face.

The figure with the red eyes ignored that and continued.

“I want to know why someone like you would infiltrate a place like this. …Oh, like I said, you don’t have to respond. The brat behind me is measuring all the electrical signals within your brain. Oh, yes. It’ll go like this. I’ll ask my question: What did you come to the Elizalina Alliance to find out? Then you’ll respond: I was looking for something important on the orders of my superiors. And that’ll be enough. Then we’ll just use the level of affirmation or denial in your head regarding what you’ve said as a key for the brat behind me to search through your memories. The method of searching lacks delicacy, but don’t worry about it.”

Sellick had received plenty of training on not speaking.

He had also received training on seeming to give a confession and really providing false information.

But what was he supposed to do to stop them if they were going to search through his head whether he played along or denied them?

Sellick G Kirnov’s idea was to not go along with their process.

If the enemy could just read his mind unconditionally, they would have taken the information they needed while he was unconscious. They were going out of their way to ask those questions because it was necessary. Therefore, he might be able to defend the information by not going along with the process they used to gain information.

He now had a spirit of resistance.

He had found a way to fight back.

As if the red eyed person had read Sellick’s mind despite him not having said a word, he pointed his index finger at Sellick’s face.

No, he was technically pointing it behind Sellick.

(What…?)

Because he was bound to the chair, he couldn’t see behind him very well even when he turned his head. He could just barely catch glimpses of something on the edge of his vision.

He then heard a kind of creaking noise.

It was similar to something being tightly bound by thin strings, but it had a heavier and more ominous ring to it.

It was barbed wire.

The smell of iron or possibly blood once more slipped in through Sellick's nose and into his lungs.

At the same time, he figured out what the object behind him was.

Multiple strings of barbed wire hung down from metal fixtures on the ceiling. A large hunk of meat was wrapped in the barbed wire and held on by the sharp metal spikes. He couldn't tell what kind of meat it was. The hunk of meat was dark red as if the outer skin had been ripped off. He could see scraps of clothing stuck on the hunk of meat in places.

Yes.

It was as if a human's head, arms, and legs had been severed, all the skin had been torn off, and then hung there wrapped in barbed wire.

"…!!!???"

Sellick G. Kirnov felt as if he had lost control of his breathing. When he looked again, he could tell there was more barbed wire hanging down. They did not have any meat on them. Instead, seven pieces of meat that had been torn apart were lying down below. The barbed wire must not have been able to withstand the weight. Adding together the one hanging and the ones on the floor, there were 8. Sellick remembered that number. That was how many people there had been in his team. All of the hunks of meat had dark red scraps of clothing stuck on them. They were quite discolored, but he remembered them, too. They were from the clothes they had all been wearing.

The monster whose red eyes were the only thing visible in that dimly lit room quietly spoke.

"They all refused to cooperate despite knowing that having the brat behind me read their minds would be fastest. It kind of pissed me off and I can get a tad

violent when I’m upset.”

Sellick heard an odd noise from below his feet.

It was caused by the leg of the chair tapping on the floor due to his trembling.

Ignoring the noise, the red eyed figure gave a smile that looked like a rip along his face and leaned in close to Sellick’s face.

“We don’t have any more hostages, so please don’t upset me.”

Accelerator and Misaka Worst opened the door and left.

The room they had been in was not a gloomy torture room. It was actually a storage area for meat. It seemed there weren’t actually any torture areas in the Elizalina Alliance.

“Boring. That was way too easy,” said Misaka Worst. “He may not have been the best, but he was still a Russian spy who had undergone anti-torture training. Misaka thought he would have some resistance to physical violence.”

“Swindling techniques haven’t changed in a long time. You just don’t give them a chance to think things through properly.”

They wouldn’t have been able to get that spy to talk just by punching and kicking him. Even actually taking out a knife and skinning him alive may not have worked.

That was why it had been necessary to make that bluff.

Even a veteran Russian spy would not know how to deal with an Academy City esper. As he did not know, he would build up a logical strategy of how to fight that unknown existence.

That was when they applied a shock from a different direction.

To do so, they had chopped some beef up into blocks, stuck scraps of clothing on it, and hung it up in barbed wire.

That had pushed the spy's already shaken mind over the limit. He had panicked. Whether it was a soldier or a spy, they were not strong in the face of pain because their sense of pain was dulled. It was because they had built up their mind to withstand the pain. That also meant that one could drop them down to having the stamina of a crying child by disturbing that mental basis. Both soldiers and civilians were the same type of living being at the core.

Accelerator leaned up against the wall.

Misaka Worst spoke to him in a tone that seemed to be mocking him.

"Keh keh. How kind of you."

"Ahn?"

"Misaka had your fighting patterns inputted in to her to a certain extent. That was the first time you've dealt with an opponent without using violence, wasn't it? Of course, Misaka only means professional opponents who made themselves your enemy, not civilians like Last Order."

"There's no point in doing something that's ineffective and I'm not in the mood to play around with human flesh," spat out Accelerator in response. "Or are you saying that wasn't stimulating enough for you?"

"No, Misaka loves tricking people. And seeing a proud professional with tears and snot running down his face due to nonexistent fear is just the best! Kya ha☆"

A smile that looked like a crushed fruit appeared on Misaka Worst's face.

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

"…What do you think of what that crybaby said?"

"There were all sorts of odd parts. The Russian army was going to use this war to start bombings and a serious invasion into the Elizalina Alliance which they've wanted for some time, right? It's odd that they would send spies in at all given that. Normally, they would withdraw the spies before the bombings. … Although that's only if they aren't expendable. Keh keh."

“The spies who were scheduled to withdraw were hurriedly ordered to remain behind a few hours ago. And then additional spies were sent to join them here.”

“Wow. That’s almost the exact same time you and Misaka entered the country.”

That was one way of looking at it.

In that case, the spies must have been quite uneasy.

They wanted to leave the Elizalina Alliance before the bombings, but their target had entered the most dangerous place. To carry out their objective, the spies had to follow Accelerator.

But…

“But that spy fell for our trick too easily in that case. It was less like he had never had the chance to fight an esper before and more like he had never even thought of the possibility of fighting an esper.”

“Maybe the spies were after you and Misaka but they weren’t told the details of their targets for security reasons. Then they could have the details explained over their radios later,” Misaka Worst commented offhand. “So what was that spy’s mission?”

“To photograph the insides of the Elizalina Alliance military facilities. He had a small camera to do it with.”

“What for?”

“So any secret documents could be taken out of the facilities and then to a designated point before the bombings. Apparently, someone on the other side of a monitor was going to give him more specific instructions.”

As he spoke Accelerator’s expression turned to one of puzzlement.

The only “documents” he had were those pieces of parchment. Were they really that important to the Russian army?

“At any rate,” Accelerator said as he removed his back from the wall and put his weight on his cane, “we can meet the people who want those parchments if we

go to that designated point. In other words, we can meet with people who know how to decipher them."

That might lead to the key to saving Last Order who was still unconscious. As such, he had to go. Whether it was selfish or not, he would even attack a military facility in order to get those people to tell him what those parchments meant.

"Misaka thinks various parts of her body are getting hard from such a selfish development☆"

"Shut up. The designated point to bring the parchments is a Russian military base near the border. I'm going to attack it. You can do whatever the hell you want."

"Misaka will of course be going to the place where more blood will be spilled. But what are you going to do about Last Order?"

"What would happen if I left her with you?"

"Misaka would probably get bored and do unspeakable things to her."

Accelerator thought about punching Misaka Worst as she cackled, but his vision suddenly started to shake.

No.

It wasn't Accelerator's vision that was shaking.

It was…

Part 3

Deep in a military base near the border between Russia and the Elizalina Alliance, Fiamma of the Right was communicating over a book-shaped spiritual item.

He was speaking to one of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, Bishop Nikolai Tolstoy.

“Now this has finally gotten interesting.” Fiamma sat on a plain chair and spoke towards the spiritual item that was placed atop a table. “To be honest, even if you did cooperate with me, Russia’s results in this war are not worth complimenting even out of flattery. It’s a pain, but I suppose I need to readjust the score myself.”

“I don’t care what you say.” Nikolai’s speech was stiff. “Just don’t hold back. You said you had Sasha Kreutzev, so send out that weapon now!! Don’t forget that Russia’s forces are being destroyed as we speak!!”

“The preparations are complete. I’ll be starting soon, but then you will not be able to tell what’s going on once again. That will be the true war in which Academy City will lose its control over the situation.”

“I don’t care what happens as long as I can accomplish my goal. If it functions as a shortcut, I will continue to aid you.”

“The Patriarch, hm? Do you really want to reach that position so badly? The Roman pope I know never looked too happy.”

“Don’t assume the top of Rome is the same as the top of Russia.”

“Is it really that great?”

“It’s even better.”

The tone of Nikolai Tolstoy’s voice lowered as he slowly asked a question.

“Where are you right now?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“You aren’t in that base. Your presence has disappeared from those coordinates.”

“Ha ha,” Fiamma, who was supposed to be in the depths of that “base”, laughed as he responded. “You’ll know soon enough…whether you want to or not.”

It may have been simple enough to witness the event, but very few people understood what it meant.

Probably the first to notice it was a man from a citizen’s group in Florence.

He had come to the front of an old church with his companions in order to protect the historical building. A world war may have been going on, but the flames of war were not burning too brightly in Italy. There was just a tense atmosphere within the cities. No one knew when something would incite a large scale riot.

The occasional vibrations were rumored to be caused by people taking advantage of the chaos to set fire to buildings and to town gas lines. That middle aged man thought that was what he was feeling then.

But he suddenly realized that the vibration that time was different.

It was not coming from somewhere outside the city.

It was coming from within.

In fact, it was coming from within the church he stood in front of.

“…?”

The middle aged man slowly turned around.

He had a very bad feeling.

He heard a creaking noise.

The historical steeple that could be called the core of the church he was supposed to be protecting was breaking in two. The construction floated up ignoring gravity and taking with it the giant bell that would ring out throughout the city on the hour.

Why had it broken?

Why was it floating?

He felt his common sense shattering within him.

And…

At that time, the giant steeple of France's Mont Saint-Michel was torn off.

At that time, a number of pillars were pulled from Italy's Basilica of St. Mary.

At that time, a grand pipe organ flew out of India's St. Joseph Church.

The Roman Catholic Church held over 2 billion followers and it had constructed many churches, monasteries, and convents all over the world over its long history. Each building had its own individuality produced by the different styles, designs, lands, time periods, and cultures with which or in which they had been constructed.

Any especially important items had been taken from those churches, monasteries, and convents.

All of the objects flew toward one spot as if being sucked in by a magnet.

They flew toward Russia.

They flew toward the cold base in which Fiamma of the Right waited.

Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of those crystallizations of each culture amassed in one place and intertwined together complexly. It was not like a jigsaw puzzle that was created from the outset to fit together. It was like trying to make one's own small gears for a broken watch by forcing together

parts to create something those parts had not been made for.

The giant mountain of constructions did not remain within the 10 kilometer base.

It expanded beyond that.

And the change did not stop there.

It continued…

A roar resounded beneath Kamijou's feet.

When he realized that, he was already floating in the air.

Or so it seemed.

He was not really floating. The snowy earth that Kamijou had been standing on had lifted up as if the ground had greatly collapsed. Underneath the ground there was the subway track that the Academy City bombardment had crushed. It may have been moving around in response to some change in Fiamma's base.

For an instant, Kamijou did not feel gravity.

Immediately afterwards, the place he was standing on rose up like a cliff. Lessar who had been about to surprise attack a nearby powered suit turned around in shock. He tried to reach out her hand, but she was just too far. Lessar was left down at the bottom of the "cliff".

"What…!?"

Kamijou could not remain standing due to the incredible shaking. He saw the Academy City tanks and powered suits that had been lifted up like him falling off the edge of the cliff.

They were flying.

The ground Kamijou stood on and the base Fiamma was inside were flying.

The facility and weapons of the Russian military base in the center fell down along with the snow.

After rising about 10 meters, the last bit of resistance disappeared. The speed suddenly rose and Kamijou was surrounded in fog. An odd pressure seemed to press his body to the ground, but he didn't have time to be confused. His eyes widened in surprise and suddenly the fog disappeared.

He could see the blue sky.

The scenery wrapped in white snow clouds was nowhere to be seen.

The freezing air hurt his throat and his lungs could not take in air very well.

Kamijou knew what all that meant.

(We're…above the clouds!?)

An explosive noise pounded in Kamijou's ears.

The supersonic bombers that had looked like tiny specks in the sky before now looked quite large. They seemed to be taking panicked evasive maneuvers in response to the sudden situation.

That was not the only noise.

There was also a low rumbling that sounded like stone gears turning. Kamijou was standing on what looked like a giant bridge made of stone. He could see a large mass a few dozen kilometers down the bridge. He could see it clearly because there was nothing in the sky to obstruct his view like the horizon or buildings, but the vastness of the structure also helped.

From that castle-like center, long, long bridges stretched out in four directions. The lengths of the bridges were not equal. One of them was twice as long as the others. Assuming the direction the fortress was travelling was the front, Kamijou was on the back bridge and the oddly long bridge was the right one. The walls, doors, steeples, and other similar items from churches of different cultures and time periods had been forcibly gathered together and had been turned into that complex shape.

In addition to those structures with hundreds of years of history were more modern items such as metal frames, metal pipes, and light fixtures. Those items might have been in the base already. Overall, it was an odd fusion that resembled

somewhere from an old church.

Were they growing or were they destroying each other?

He didn't know the meaning of the sight before his eyes and then a voice came to his ears from somewhere.

Perhaps speakers were set up in various places on that flying castle. Unlike with the flour doll from before, there was some static mixed in.

"I was not preparing some large spiritual item or facility."

It was Fiamma of the Right.

His voice sounded somehow cheerful. He might have been satisfied at having imprisoned his target of Imagine Breaker in the sky.

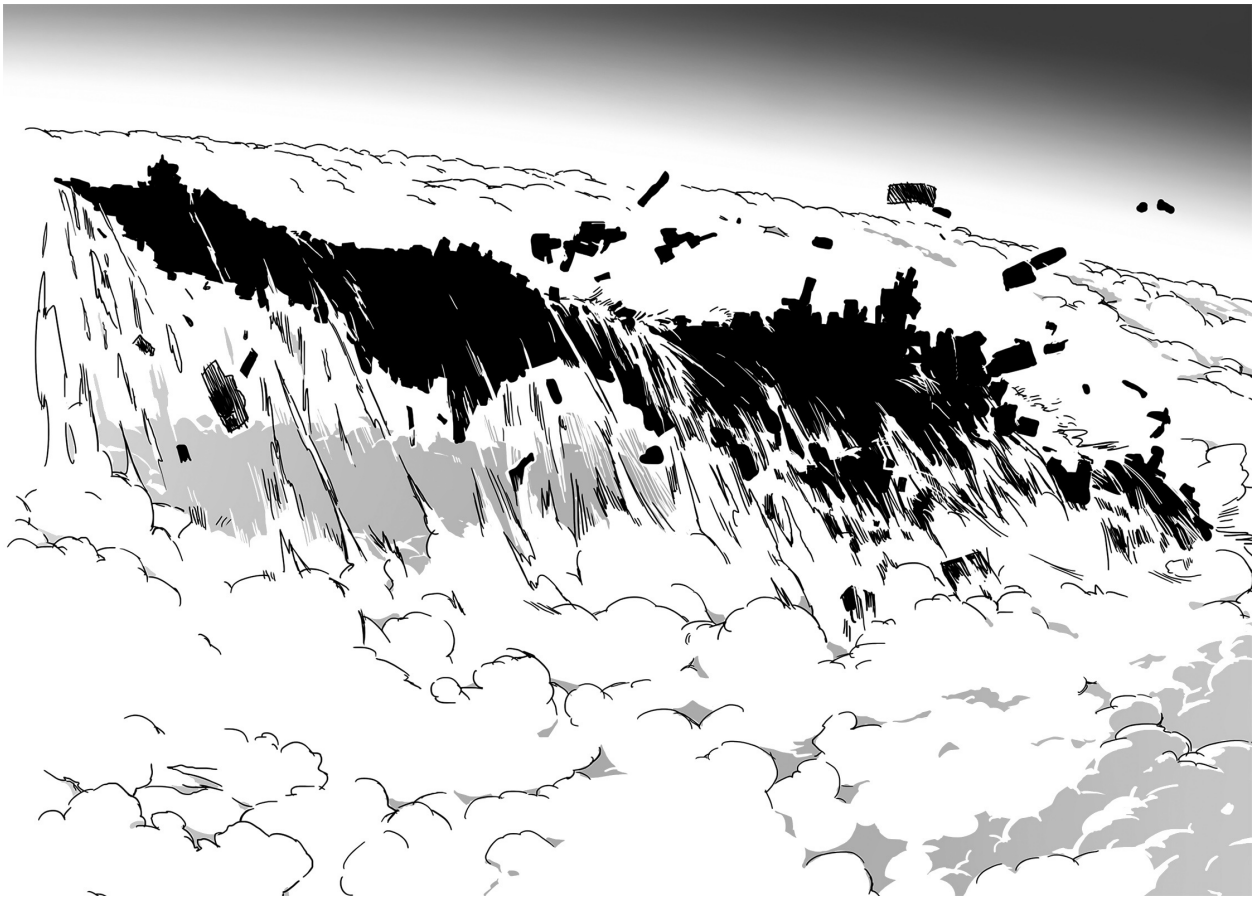
"*I was preparing the space needed to put this together*. After all, everything else I needed was waiting for me all over the world. I only need to spend my own savings. For the construction, I needed a work area that was like a sterilized room. A large amount of expenses, time, and workers were needed for that consecration."

Even then, the mysterious fortress was growing before Kamijou's eyes.

It was almost like a blast of wind made of stone.

"The amount of materials is not a problem. What's important is constructing the self-expansion cycle. Once that cycle is complete, it can expand as needed without any more materials."

The stone blast of wind shot past the spot Kamijou was on.



He had been standing atop a stone bridge before, but all of a sudden he was inside an old building. He was a few dozen kilometers from Fiamma’s base. The fortress must have already expanded that much.

“…Are you sure it wasn’t a mistake to let me on?” Kamijou asked.

“Quite the opposite. Your right arm is absolutely necessary to carry out my goal.” Fiamma chuckled. “I suppose I should welcome you to my castle, the Star of Bethlehem.”

The Star of Bethlehem.

Since Fiamma had brought it up, that name must have held deep religious and magical meaning.

From the way he spoke, his manipulation of the Roman Catholic Church, his kidnappings of Index and Sasha, his starting of World War III, his attempt to steal Kamijou’s right arm, and all his other actions were connected.

That included sending that fortress up 3000 meters into the sky above the clouds.

It had a radius of a few dozen kilometers.

It was an overwhelmingly incomprehensible sight like seeing Academy City itself floating in the sky.

Of course, an object of any size or material could float if it had devices attached that gave it the lift necessary. It was the same as how a balloon would float regardless of if it was big or small. That was science. As such, it was nonsense to make a huge deal out of a large object floating.

But despite that kind of theory or reasoning, had a manmade object that large ever been made to float in the sky so with such stability in the history of mankind?

It was a historical first.

It was the same as the invention of ships, the invention of cars, and the invention of airplanes.

A chance had been born with the destructive force needed to definitively twist the range of what humans could control.

Such a great sense of the foreign wrapped around Kamijou's body that he was forced to think that.

It may be true that great things could be accomplished with that, but he was also assaulted by a great unease because of the negative things that could also be accomplished with it.

"…"

However, that did not break Kamijou's spirit.

He did not stay focused on that.

All he had to do was defeat Fiamma and destroy Index's remote control spiritual item.

Being trapped in that ridiculously huge fortress threatened to make him lose his nerve, but he calmed himself and focused on the fact that he had more hope left than if he had been left behind on the ground.

Kamijou took a short breath and then finally stood up.

It seemed odd that he did not have any kind of altitude sickness after being thrown that high into the sky. He had a slight pain around his temples, but he had no deep urge to vomit, difficulty breathing, or narrowing of vision. He decided that moving around would not be a problem.

(The air pressure and temperature are the same as on the surface…? Is there some kind of weird barrier erected around the fortress?)

When he thought about it, he recalled that the clouds had split apart oddly when the fortress had cut through them…at least he thought they had. It was possible that they were being protected by some kind of field in the shape of a sphere squished in at the top and bottom.

He had no idea exactly how much magical effort something like that took.

However, he knew it would take a great amount of resources and effort just like causing that fortress to float would.

The power of the large organization that had 2 billion followers was symbolized and displayed in that.

(…Fiamma went out of his way to prepare this ridiculously huge facility. I don't know what his final goal is, but this Star of Bethlehem must be necessary to accomplish it.)

As he thought, Kamijou looked down at his right hand.

He pressed the palm against a random wall and a crack of orange light appeared. An area of about a meter around his hand crumbled. However, some kind of power caused the fragments to float in place rather than to fall. They then moved back to their original place. There was most likely a core somewhere.

(In that case, I can apply damage to Fiamma by destroying that. While I'm searching for him, I'll destroy everything of importance I come across. There's

no reason to just leave alone the things that the enemy can use.)

Just as he decided on that plan, Kamijou heard a loud noise.

There were windows in the stone room, but the glass all shattered. Kamijou plugged his ears and looked outside to see numerous fighters flying through the blue sky.

They were Academy City fighters.

Those crystallizations of cutting edge science soared about in the Russian sky.

Fiamma must have also detected the fighters because a voice spoke out that seemed to be suppressing various emotions.

It was like someone who had water thrown on them right when they were getting worked up.

“Sasha Kreutzev, the medium for the angel. The remote control spiritual item for the 103,000 grimoires. The ceremonial site, the Star of Bethlehem. And finally, your right arm that is most appropriate for wielding my power. I have everything I need, so I would rather the side characters would leave.”

Kamijou had a bad feeling about what was to come.

However, he did not know where Fiamma was in the large fortress, so he had no way of stopping Fiamma’s words.

And then Fiamma of the Right spoke quietly.

“Head out, Archangel Gabriel. Blow them all away.”

The world turned to night.

As if everything had been instantaneously painted over with black, the sky turned to a night sky.

“You’re kidding…”

That magic was so great that it gave one control of the positional relationships of the earth, the moon, and the sun. Kamijou could only stare in blank amazement

upon seeing that.

It wasn't that he didn't understand the phenomenon he was seeing.

Kamijou Touma's eyes were opened wide to the limit and he was trembling because he *did* know.

He had seen that before.

It was an angel's spell.

That supernatural phenomenon was the build up to the even greater spell known as Sweep that interfered with the movements of heavenly bodies, built up one's own power, and was enough to destroy the entire human race without moving a single fingertip. That was a true angel's spell. As such, it was clear what the being using it should be called.

Kamijou's face was paler than the night sky as he heard Fiamma continue to speak.

Fiamma sounded like he was enjoying himself.

He sounded like a soldier showing off a weapon he had heavily practiced with.

"No, I suppose I should refer to you as Misha Kreutzev here."

Immediately afterwards, some sort of blue point of light became visible in the pitch black night sky.

If one stared at it close enough, one might have seen the form of a person. However, it was so far away that it just looked like a small point of light.

But then…

Sound disappeared.

A giant wing-like object stretched from the blue point of light cutting horizontally across the entire visible portion of the heavens.

With a bit of a delay, an explosive noise pounded at Kamijou's ears.

A few dozen of the unmanned fighters sweeping across the Russian sky were blown to pieces. The fighters that showed life-like movements must have been the ones with actual pilots. A few of those had their main wings severed and Kamijou could see the pilots frantically attempting to escape with their parachutes.

The destruction did not end there.

That blue point of light had swung that giant wing solely to blow away that formation of unmanned fighters. However, the giant wing disintegrated partway through breaking it in half. The severed half flew on and created a gigantic explosion near the horizon where it landed.

An enormous mass of dirt flew up into the air.

An entire mountain had been blown away.

“Well, Angel Fall was an accidental spell. With a summoning method based on and derived from that, stability is a bit of a problem.”

It wasn’t normal.

The difference in numbers had been overturned in an instant.

That was an angel.

An angel was a being that held overwhelming power.

“But doesn’t this make things pretty interesting? The science side has been showing off all sorts of secret weapons, so isn’t it about time the magic side got serious?”

And Fiamma smiled within the fortress.

(The Star of Bethlehem is still incomplete. I had to hurry its rise because of Academy City’s ground forces, but now that Misha Kreutzev is on the move, my victory will not be shaken.)

Yes.

There was something he lacked.

“Those parchments.”

The spiritual item Fiamma had obtained gave him free access to the 103,000 grimoires held within Index, but that was not enough. Truly esoteric knowledge related to things such as angels and God’s Right Seat was not held within her. Those parchments were needed to make up for that. Once he had his path to that knowledge, Fiamma of the Right’s plan would be fulfilled by sending it into a feedback within the Star of Bethlehem.

“Now then,” Fiamma of the Right said calmly. “How about you go retrieve them, Misha Kreutzev? Just because your opponents are weak is no reason to hold back. Go retrieve them with your full power.”

Between the Lines 4

Misaka Mikoto also witnessed that change.

She was riding on an Academy City HsB-02 supersonic bomber. Of course, she was not taking part in a military operation on the orders of a superior. What she was doing was almost…no, it *was* a hijacking. The special forces that had been intended to ride in that bomber had been left behind in a District 23 hangar.

Perhaps due to the special characteristics of a bomber, the aircraft was over 80 meters long, but its only window was in the cockpit in the front. It was a coincidence that Mikoto had been in the cockpit. It was just because that was the only place with a proper seat.

Mikoto showed the pilot the screen of her handheld device.

“Anyway, get close to here and then I’ll parachute down on my own. After that, you can do whatever you want.”

The screen showed a still image from a recorded news program.

A reporter was saying something with a snowy plain in the background and an Asian boy who seemed to be a civilian was visible at the edge of the screen.

Letters at the bottom of the screen displayed the city where the footage had been taken. That cute tyrant was ordering him to go there.

“…D-do you know how much risk you’re taking on by doing this?”

“Doing this?” Mikoto frowned. “Doesn’t what I’ve already done give you some idea about what I can do? I had no problem with taking on group of professional assassins.”

“…”

“This isn’t an issue with how risky it is. If one side is putting all their efforts into killing a normal high school student and the other side is putting all her efforts into saving that normal high school student, which side do you want to be on? Which side could you proudly say you were on?”

The pilot fell silent upon being asked those questions.

Mikoto did not think that she was a “good person”. Nor did she think all the other people she could see were masses of good will. The incident involving the Sisters and Accelerator had taught her how dark an environment Academy City was and how merciless humans could be.

But at the same time, she knew that not every person in the world was that dark. There was that boy who had held out his right hand to save Mikoto and the others from that hellish experiment. There were the Sisters who had stood up in response to Mikoto’s call. While there was unavoidable darkness and desire within people’s hearts, there was a small but strong light there as well.

That was why the pilot had fallen silent.

That was also why he was unable to laugh scornfully at her while drenched in the darkness of that underground organization.

(…Ahh. This kind of talk just isn't my thing. I think he infected me or something.)

Mikoto scratched at her head.

(This is all that idiot's fault! As soon as I find him, I'm punching him!! Strategy meeting complete!!)

Suddenly, something huge quickly moved up from below the white clouds. The supersonic bomber she was on was quite large at over 80 meters long, but this other object made it look like a tiny bug in comparison. The giant construction had to be dozens of kilometers long. It was like an entire city was floating there. The sight simply seemed to ignore any scientific sense (even the sense of Academy City that seemed fairly ridiculous to begin with).

The object had a completely unreasonable design.

It was just a giant mass that seemed to have been created by taking stone buildings from different ages and cultures and then clumping them together like masses of clay. Even then, it was changing form from moment to moment like gears or like a living being.

(…What is that?)

Mikoto pressed herself up against the reinforced glass and stared at the mass.

Making an object that big float in the sky was probably something worth a Guinness world record. She couldn't spot any wings or rocket engines, but it had to be gaining lift somehow. Perhaps it was actually hollow and the inside was similar to a hot-air balloon or a blimp.

(Why is it squirming around like that? Is it a collection of stand-alone robots?)

However, what truly surprised Mikoto was not the giant mass itself.

Something like a stone bridge extended out on the edge of the mass and she thought she saw the familiar face of a certain spiky haired boy.

(You’re kidding…!!)

When Mikoto frantically tried to make sure, the supersonic bomber’s intense speed had already taken them past that point. The location of the window was limited, so she couldn’t just turn her head to keep looking.

That unexpected scene had brought Mikoto’s thoughts to a halt, but the pilot did not wait around.

A steeple sticking out from the side of the mass was going to strike the body of the supersonic bomber.

He frantically operated the stick and the inertia suddenly gave Mikoto an experience similar to zero gravity as she was not strapped in. It only lasted a few seconds, but her body had definitely floated in the air.

She fell back into her seat, but she didn’t have time to complain.

The changes did not stop.

When they moved back above the clouds, the blue sky without any sign of weather suddenly changed to dark night as if someone had flipped a light switch. With that giant construction there as well, the scene just looked like a joke to her.

There was a light in the darkness.

It glowed like the moon in the dark sky.

But it wasn’t the moon.

It was a human-like silhouette floating in the sky ignoring gravity. It was so far away, she couldn’t tell what its face looked like. However, she could say one thing for sure: it was not a normal human.

This was because it had what looked like wings growing from its back.

Those mysterious wings looked like crystals and like a peacock tail. The shorter ones were less than a meter long and the longer ones were over 100 meters long. The figure had a few dozen of those wings of unequal length.

Mikoto didn’t have time to question it.

The figure swung one of those wings.

It was rather large at 100 meters, but that still was not enough to match the scale of the sky. Currently, the supersonic bomber was flying in an area farther away than that.

And yet the body of the HsB-02 that was made of the latest nonmetal materials was suddenly sliced in two.

The strike sliced the cockpit front to back. No, that single strike sliced through the entire 80 meter length of the bomber.

“Oh, you have *got* to be kidding!!”

Mikoto felt the chill of the high altitude air stab into her.

In the next instant, she was thrown out of the plane and into the air 3000 meters up.

She couldn’t even cry out.

At the edge of her vision, she could see the pilot spinning but wearing a parachute. He would probably be fine, but she couldn’t count on him. He had no duty to save her after all.

However, Mikoto felt more anger at having been taken away from the giant structure than she did fear of the height from which she was falling. Her small body was even then plowing through the clouds as it headed for the ground. She could clearly feel the thing she thought she had finally grabbed slipping from her fingers.

Of course, she couldn’t change that if she just fell to her death.

(Kh!! Wh-what do I do!?)

Mikoto changed her focus and looked down toward the ground. She didn’t even have 1000 meters left until she landed. She then spotted a mass of metal much farther down than her.

It was an attack helicopter.

She didn’t know if it was from Academy City or Russian, but she could use it.

Mikoto could manipulate magnetism.

She was not going to use it to cling to the attack helicopter. At that height and that speed, her flesh-and-blood body would be crushed the instant she made contact. She had to only use a bit of the magnetism she could so she didn’t completely cling to it.

Her body shot past the attack helicopter.

She didn’t completely cling to it, but there was a clear force lifting Mikoto’s body toward the attack helicopter. That force acted as a cushion to softly lower her downward speed. As Mikoto headed down toward the white snowy plains, she strengthened that force bit by bit in a carefully regulated manner so as not to crush her body from the shock of deceleration but to still prevent herself from being killed upon landing.

If someone had been watching from nearby, it may have looked like she was lowering herself down on an invisible rope.

Mikoto planted her feet atop the snow and completely cut off the magnetic force.

“Now then…”

She was in the middle of a battlefield. Here and there on that plain with almost no manmade objects she could see tanks and other armored vehicles from both Academy City and the Russian army. It might have been obvious, but the Russian weapons were the ones being destroyed.

Mikoto smelled the unpleasant odor of fuel being burned and looked above her.

Even using her powerful magnetism, jumping up 3000 meters into the air was impossible.

“How am I supposed to get up above the clouds?” Mikoto muttered and then heard the sound of someone stepping in the snow behind her.

From the magnetic state, she could tell there was a human form about 10 meters behind her.

She sharply turned around and…

“…You’re…”

Mikoto froze.

The other person’s expression did not change.

A girl stood there holding a rifle called a Kalashnikov that was made of both wood and metal instead of an Academy City F2000R.

“Misaka’s serial number is #10777, kindly explains Misaka to the Original who is at a loss for words.”

“Were you at an organization in Russia that was working with Academy City!?”

“The battle for the evacuation there is complete, so Misaka was given the rest of the time to spend on her private business, announces Misaka in a vacation-y mood with a dangerous rifle in one hand.”

“Private business…?” Mikoto repeated in shock.

#10777 pointed up into the sky.

“Are you here on private business as well? says Misaka asking for confirmation.”

“…Well, it certainly isn’t an official job or anything.”

Chapter 7: An Angel Massacring from the Heavens. *MISHA_the_Angel_“GABRIEL”.*

Part 1

A giant vibration shook the field hospital within the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations.

At that time, Hamazura Shiage was watching Elizalina treating Takitsubo Rikou.

Takitsubo was lying on an emergency stretcher and was wearing a clear oxygen mask. Instead of an oxygen tank at the other end of the tube, it was connected to something like incense made of various dried and crushed plants. According to Elizalina, that would remove the Body Crystal from Takitsubo’s body, but…

Suddenly, a large earthquake shook the building.

Takitsubo’s body fell from the stretcher onto the ground.

“What the hell!? Takitsubo!!”

Hamazura yelled out and started to run over to her, but Elizalina stopped him with a hand.

Elizalina used her abnormally thin fingers to remove the mask from Takitsubo.

“This is not a problem. The treatment is already complete. The toxin within her body has been removed.”

“…”

She had said it so easily that it didn’t feel real to Hamazura.

The issue of the Body Crystal had been such an impediment to Hamazura and Takitsubo and yet it had been dealt with so easily?

Elizalina then spoke again as if adding a remark.

“But this only removed the undigested toxin. The portions of her body that have already been eaten into weren’t replaced. She should recover a bit, but she isn’t fully healed. A different method of healing will need to be found for the after effects of the drug,” Elizalina said as she put out the small flames causing the smoldering incense. “Forcing her status up will only give her a greater relapse. I’ve never been too fond of the performance of science.”

Someone threw open the door.

Accelerator entered the room.

“Hey, have you seen what’s going on outside!? What the fuck is it!?”

“It’s Fiamma. I never thought he would shake the four elements themselves…”

Elizalina frowned and disappeared through the door. The field hospital had originally been an old fortress. There were no windows, so they could not see outside from there.

Hamazura was curious, but he had to focus on Takitsubo.

In order to return her to the stretcher, Hamazura held her in his arms. He then noticed something was different. The feeling of lifting a bag filled with dirt was gone. She was lighter. This was because Takitsubo was making sure to adjust her weight.

Her will had returned to every corner of her body.

Hamazura felt that more than anything symbolized what a large change had occurred within her.

“Hamazura…?”

“It’s okay,” Hamazura said as he was overcome with relief.

Hamazura continued speaking as Takitsubo actually wrapped her own small arms around him.

“I’ll explain everything later, but I’ll tell you this for now: it’s okay now. You aren’t completely healed yet and it will probably take Academy City’s help to completely cure all of the after effects, but the Body Crystal will not make your health deteriorate any more. The risk to your life is gone. So it’s okay. …From now on, it’s our turn to take them on.”

The body heat he felt from Takitsubo was that of a normal girl.

She didn’t have the unnaturally high temperature like that of someone with a cold.

After just feeling that sensation for a bit, Hamazura finally pulled himself away from her.

She could now stand up under her own power.

Takitsubo sat on the stretcher and Hamazura spoke to her again.

“I’ll go call a nurse. Do you need some water? If you’re hungry, I could get you some fruit.”

“Hamazura, what are we going to do now?”

“If we’re really going to take on Academy City, we can’t just stay here. We managed to escape the Academy City pursuers by entering the Elizalina Alliance. What’s left is heading back to Russia and searching for something to negotiate with.”

Hamazura stopped speaking for a second.

He looked Takitsubo in the eye as he continued.

“But we don’t have to do that together. You’ve just gotten over your illness. You can just wait here and…”

“Hamazura,” Takitsubo said cutting him off. “Would you wake up if I kissed you or would I have to slap you?”

“Saying something like that just makes me want to leave you here even more.” Hamazura roughly stroked Takitsubo’s head and looked over toward the door. “I need to find some assistance. But I don’t really like stealing a car from someone who saved you.”

And then Hamazura saw some scattered documents out of the corner of his eye. They were in a field hospital, but it was really just a military facility that had medical equipment in it. It seemed some of the military related equipment and documents still remained.

What caught his eye was a pile of fax paper.

Hamazura could not read Russian, but he recognized the photo given along with the text.

It was Digurv’s village.

“…It’s a request to be taken into the Alliance and the issues related to doing so,” said Takitsubo who had read the Russian report from behind Hamazura.

Hamazura frowned.

“So the village Digurv and the others live in wants to join the Elizalina Alliance?”

The village was located almost right next to the border of the Elizalina Alliance and the Russian army had been trying to take the land. They had harassed the village by scattering land mines and had even sent privateers in to attack. Escaping that violence from Russia by becoming a part of the Elizalina Alliance was not too surprising a desire.

However, the people of the Alliance had not taken in the village despite their suffering just outside the border.

That likely had to do with the “issues” mentioned in the report.

“It doesn’t seem there are any issues with the village or the people living in it.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is a nuclear missile silo from the cold war era near the village. Because of what it was, it was hidden in a forest away from the base.”

Hamazura listened in shock to what Takitsubo was saying.

She flipped through the report.

“The silo itself has been untouched for decades and the missiles were removed, so it’s just an old abandoned facility. However, there is a concern that Russia will determine that the Elizalina Alliance has obtained the technology of Russia’s nuclear launching facilities if they were to take the village and that area into the Alliance.”

“God dammit,” Hamazura spat out.

The nuclear silo didn’t belong to Digurv and the others. The Russian army had made the facility long ago, but now it was taking away the villagers’ freedom and putting them under the threat of landmines and privateers. It may truly have been a good thing that those Academy City forces had arrived because the villagers might have been massacred otherwise.

“The Kremlin Report…?”

However, the unfairness did not end there.

Takitsubo reached for a different report.

“…This is bad, Hamazura.”

“What’s that report? Those diagrams look like data on the area’s weather.”

“It’s the values for wind direction, temperature, and humidity. I think the data is being used to predict the spread of bacteria.”

“…Bacteria?”

Hamazura’s shoulders stiffened at that word.

Takitsubo looked down at the fax paper on which the Kremlin Report was

printed.

“This was sent by the Russian army. The original Kremlin Report and supplemental documents were faxed together. In order to justify the actions they’re taking within their own country, they’re making this performance of a warning. It was actually only sent out a few hours ago so no major evacuation could be carried out even upon seeing it. Most likely, it was sent to the Elizalina Alliance as a threat. It’s basically saying ‘you’re next’.”

“What’s this about bacteria? What does this have to do with Digurv and the others!?”

“It seems the Russian army has made an official announcement of the Kremlin Report which is a defense manual for the nuclear launch facilities. The plan is to disseminate a bacteriological weapon in order to recover nuclear launch facilities that have been occupied or that are about to be occupied. This is…”

“Is that being used on the nuclear silo near Digurv’s village!? That’s their own country. Is the Russian army planning to indiscriminately spread a bacteriological weapon!?”

He felt a bit dizzy.

However, given the location of the nuclear silo and the Academy City forces protecting Digurv’s village, that area could very well become a target of the Kremlin Report.

“Didn’t you say that silo hadn’t been used in decades? And there are no missiles there, right?”

“It still possesses the functionality to launch and missiles can be brought in from outside. Russia’s experimental missile defense network they put up in recent years is focused on the national borders, so a launch from a silo within the country was not taken into consideration.”

“…So they can’t defend against a missile launched from that silo?”

“The heads of the Russian army who created the defense network would know better than anyone the threat of a ballistic missile getting through. They would probably do anything to stop that from happening.”

“Dammit…”

At that rate, a killer virus would be disseminated near the nuclear silo in the name of protecting the Russian people. If that happened, Digurv and the other villagers would be caught up in it. That virus was bad enough that it was referred to as a weapon. Hamazura did not even want to imagine what kind of mortality rate it had.

“When is it scheduled to be disseminated?”

“I don’t know. I just know that the wind direction means that the bacteriological weapon is unlikely to reach the Elizalina Alliance. And if that danger came up, that Elizalina person would likely give an evacuation order to the people here.”

They didn’t know when it would be disseminated.

The operation might have been in progress right that very instant. If Hamazura and anyone else took action to stop it, they could easily end up just getting caught up in it.

But…

“Takitsubo, will you wait here?”

“Are you planning to use the military technology of the bacterial wall used in the Kremlin Report to negotiate with Academy City? But that has no special meaning to Academy Cit—”

“No, not that. I can’t just leave Digurv and the others to die. I know it’s nothing more than a risk for us, but I can’t abandon them. I mean, this is just wrong!! I haven’t exactly walked down a proper path in my life. I’ve made a lot of people suffer through violence. But this is well above that level. Stopping it isn’t what’s strange. It’s strange that it’s happening in the first place!! How can everyone head down paths like this with serious faces!?”

“…”

Takitsubo Rikou stared at Hamazura’s face for a bit.

Finally, she nodded.

“Understood. I’ll go, too.”

“Takitsubo?”

“I didn’t get to talk with anyone in that village, but I remember what they did for me. I want to fight for them, too.”

“You’d better not regret this.”

“The same goes for you, Hamazura.”

They both nodded and then headed for the exit of the hospital room.

They knew that wasn’t what they should be doing at that time. They had yet to find anything to negotiate with and they could easily lose their lives simply by heading into the war torn Russia and getting involved in a fight they had nothing to do with. Making an unnecessary detour amid all that, would only shorten their lives.

Hamazura Shiage checked over all that in his mind.

But his mind was still made up.

He had a debt to repay.

Part 2

A scream rang out.

It was not a human scream.

The howl was more foreign. It slipped into human hearts with no resistance and

shook up the emotions within. One wanted to reject it more than the sound of fingernails on the blackboard, but one also felt an intense feeling of guilt at rejecting it. The incomprehensible cry was difficult to accept and difficult to reject. The voice easily exceeded the limits of human vocal cords as it resounded throughout that nighttime battlefield that looked as if it had been covered in ink.

An angel.

Gabriel.

Misha Kreutzev.

“Stop,” Kamijou said without meaning to.

Something floated in the vast battlefield like a single light in the darkness. It was a bluish-white light. A human-like silhouette stayed oddly still at 3000 meters up in the air.

Wings grew from the silhouette’s back.

They were ice wings that looked like crystals.

Their lengths were uneven. Some were only a few dozen centimeters while others were longer than 100 meters. Each of those uneven wings moved independently and ominous sparks flew when they struck each other. Kamijou knew that all of those wings held the destructive power to sever a mountain just by touching it.

As they struck each other, the wings stored up just a tiny bit of power.

But that was enough.

“Stoooooo

The Academy City fighters and supersonic bombers that were made of the latest technology were sliced apart. A few of the ice wings intentionally came apart and became hundreds and thousands of blade-like fragments which rained down on the tanks spread out on the surface. A great shockwave was created and even the Star of Bethlehem shook slightly despite being so high up in the air.

Kamijou looked down from a broken window, but he couldn't see what was happening on the surface because of the thick cloud cover. There were a few openings here or there, but he couldn't grasp the situation just from that. A large amount of snow had been blown into the air creating a further curtain obstructing his view.

"Dammit…"

Directly below the distant archangel, a hole with a radius of a few dozen meters had opened in the thick cloud cover. When the great number of fragments had been fired down, they had blown away the clouds in that area.

Pilots could be seen escaping the sliced up fighters in parachutes.

The archangel paid them no heed.

It did not aim its ice wings in their direction.

However, that was not due to mercy or kindness. Gabriel swung a wing toward another bomber and the gust of wind created by the pylon-like wing swinging through the air was enough to crush the parachutes and rid them of all lift.

If they had a spare parachute, they might be fine, but if they didn't, they had no way of avoiding death.

The word war did not fully cover it.

It was divine punishment.

Kamijou gulped at the thought of that word.

(It isn't just the Star of Bethlehem. Fiamma, you bastard, did you kidnap Sasha in order to add that archangel to the power at your command!?)

“Dammit!!”

That was no time to freeze up. Kamijou rushed through that stone room and ran on through the Star of Bethlehem. It seemed Fiamma was giving that angel orders. However, he would have used it sooner if he had been able to use it at any time.

There may have been a connection with the rise of the Star of Bethlehem.

If there was some kind of key object that was moving the archangel, he might be able to destroy that. And even if there wasn’t, he might be able to stop Gabriel by defeating Fiamma himself.

Of course, Kamijou did not know much about the magic side.

But…

(That doesn’t matter.)

As he heard numerous explosions even then, Kamijou gritted his teeth while he ran.

(I’ll just destroy everything of importance until that angel stops moving!!)

After running through a few rooms, the sky was before him.

He was on a wide stone bridge, but it had no railings on either side. The intense winds and shockwaves from explosions threatened to blow Kamijou’s body to the side. The dark sky gave him the same kind of bottomless unease as the ocean at night.

However, he couldn’t just stop.

Even Academy City’s elite troops could do nothing against that monster. At that rate, they would just get defeated as a demonstration. Even if he couldn’t fight it directly, Kamijou was the only one who had a chance of stopping that angel indirectly.

He ran across the 100 meter long bridge and opened the door to the room on the other side.

A complex structure that looked like a pipe organ was spread out on one wall. It may have been a magical item or it may have just been one of the decorative items used to construct the Star of Bethlehem. And even if it had some magical purpose, it might have had nothing to do with the angel.

The way to check was simple enough.

He just had to touch it with his right hand and see if it was destroyed.

Kamijou stepped further into the room with that idea in mind, but…

“…!?”

His breath caught in his throat.

It came directly from the side.

A person had been hiding behind the pews lined up in the room like it was a chapel. That person had suddenly tackled him from the side.

The two of them collapsed to the floor.

Kamijou was having trouble breathing from the impact and his body reflexively tried to suck in air, but he forced down that urge in order to hold his breath and roll along the floor. When collapsed like that, the battle could be decided by who ended up on top. It seemed his attacker was thinking the same thing because the person tried to continue to roll and stay on top.

But the attacker’s body struck one of the pews.

Now that they had stopped, Kamijou got up on his attacker’s stomach to keep the person on the ground.

To be in that place, the attacker must have been a Roman Catholic or Russian Orthodox elite.

Kamijou was just about to swing his fist down, but…

“Huh…?”

He froze in place.

He recognized the face.

Long wavy blonde hair covered up the person’s eyes. She wore restraint-like black belts and clothes that were really just innerwear made of a sheer red material. She was younger than Kamijou. The belt at her waist held instruments of torture that were tools such as hammers and saws modified for use on the human body.

While he did recognize her, she was not an acquaintance of his.

After all, when he had first seen her, she had been “switched out”.

For an instant he mixed up her name, but then he muttered the attacker’s proper name.

“Sasha Kreutzev…?”

Part 3

Elizalina walked quickly through the gloomy field hospital.

It was really an old fortress being used as a military facility, so it did not have many windows. Before peering out a small window, she had an uncomfortable feeling and when she actually did look out, her lips moved almost on their own in response to what she witnessed.

“How can this be…?”

Night spread out before her.

Floating in the completely starless night was a giant fortress made of churches, monasteries, and convents from across the world.

And like a moon shining in that odd night was “something” bluish-white.

It was a human silhouette with giant wings.

It was an angel.

Even if a magician used a portion of one in the form of Telesma, that magician never really thought of the possibility of actually seeing one. She didn’t know what Fiamma was thinking, but the danger was even greater than if an asteroid were on a collision course. It was like bringing about a global ice age in order to defeat an enemy who was pointing a blade at you.

“…”

Accelerator was leaning against the wall and looking in the direction of Elizalina. He had been drawn to the area by the window as well. His focus was not on Elizalina’s back but on the window past her.

The mysterious being known as Aiwass had told him to go to Russia.

The parchments he had found there seemed to have been intended to be delivered to that fortress that had floated up into the sky from the Russian military base near the border.

That angel-like thing had appeared from that fortress and it was making large-scale attacks on the elite Academy City forces.

That’s right.

An angel.

(…It’s almost exactly like the mysterious core of the issue that brat and I were forced into dealing with.)

On September 30th, Accelerator had seen giant wings of light dancing during his fight with Kihara Amata. It seemed their appearance had been related to Last Order. And Aiwass had appeared based on those giant dancing wings of light that were apparently called Fuse Kazakiri.

If the angel that had appeared in the Russian sky was the same thing and that

giant fortress was a means of bringing about and controlling the angel…

(It's possible that technology could also be used to control the movements of an angel and send it away. This could be the way to save that brat from the angel or whatever that's making her suffer!!)

Elizalina suddenly turned around toward him.

"Run away," she said.

"What?"

"Hurry!! If you do not leave this place now, they will come here!!"

"They who!? And why are they after me!?"

They yelled at each other and Elizalina cooled her head first. She worked at keeping her voice calm.

"The person who started this war is likely in that castle. If he can freely control that angel, then even Academy City is in a hopeless situation. If they truly grasp the threat, they may consider using nuclear warheads. But…"

"But what?"

"That castle is incomplete." Elizalina glanced over toward the window. "The parchments you have prove that. If they are important enough that Fiamma wanted to bring them to himself even if he had to use the army to do it, then he will have all of the pieces he needs once he gets them."

Accelerator's focus turned to the parchments in his pocket that he did not know the point of.

"They were important enough to have transported in secret…"

"Whatever he is going to use them for, if they are necessary for Fiamma's plan, he will use everything he has to retrieve that final piece. …And that may include that angel," Elizalina said quietly. "Fiamma currently has almost complete control over Index's 103,000 grimoires, but from past examples, it seems possible that deeper information regarding angels or God's Right Seat is not

recorded there. Those parchments may be needed to plug the hole made by some missing information. When put together with the 103,000 grimoires, he can make a bridge of knowledge taking him to his ultimate goal."

"Index…?"

A faint dangerous light appeared in Accelerator's eyes.

Aiwass had told him to remember the term Index Librorum Prohibitorum and the Level 0 who had defeated Academy City's strongest Level 5 had left a note saying the same.

Yet another connection had been made with the dark side of the world and with some unknown set of laws that Accelerator did not know the details of but still apparently had some deep connection to Accelerator and Last Order.

(That fucking Level 0. How far ahead of me on this path is he…?)

Not knowing what Accelerator was thinking about, Elizalina continued.

"So you are in danger. Due to the spies that had unfortunately made it into my base, they must have received word of this. Even if you hand over the parchments, you could easily still be captured in an attempt to find out where they ended up."

"Hand them over?" Accelerator muttered. "Those might be the last key to freeing that brat from this angel or whatever kind of fucking fairy tale creature it is. I'm not going to hand them over now."

"Then you need to hurry. To be honest, the Alliance will not be able to protect you if Fiamma and the Russian army go all out. If you do not intend to face defeat here, you should hide yourself for now even if you intend to fight back."

As if provoked by Elizalina's words, Accelerator moved his gaze elsewhere.

Misaka Worst responded to his gaze.

"Sure thing. Misaka will go retrieve Last Order." She waved her hand and cheerfully headed for the hospital room. "But she would like a weapon. Even an old gun would be fine. But this rifle is supposed to have a pretty strong recoil, so

it would just be a burden with a broken arm. But then just a handgun might not have enough power. Now, this is a problem. Maybe it's just because the image of the AK is so strong, but do you have a nice version of this submachine gun?"

"?"

Without even looking at Elizalina who was frowning, Misaka Worst opened the door to Last Order's hospital room.

"You are a person that was kind enough to save Misaka. You probably just want to flee while letting the Russians see you have the parchments so the soldiers will leave the Alliance. Ee hee hee."

Elizalina looked surprised, but Misaka Worst entered the hospital room before she could ask for details. Instead, she turned toward Accelerator.

He was gritting his teeth.

(…That bitch. That's quite a personality she has. She doesn't think about anything other than pissing me off, does she?)

"I-is what she was saying true? That's just too reckless!!"

As he waved a hand as if driving Elizalina away, Accelerator muttered a few words in a tone that made it sound like he really didn't want to say them.

"…It's a bonus job, god dammit."

Part 4

There was a night sky when it should not have been night, the Star of Bethlehem floated in the sky, and an incomplete archangel had been dragged down by

artificial means.

William Orwell, the mercenary who had once been called Acqua of the Back, silently stared up at that warped world. After crushing the privateer base, he had headed for Fiamma's fortress, but he had not made it and was standing in the middle of a snowy plain.

Fiamma of the Right had made it that far.

Using Telesma to accomplish one's goal was not a rare thing in magic. It was done in old times, recent times, Western styles, and Eastern styles. However, using that huge an amount was different. That situation was not normal. It was true that it was theoretically possible using the proper methods, but it was still astounding that power that could massacre every single human on earth could be used so easily.

But then, an archangel was an archangel.

That was the existence that had announced the conception of the Son of God, that received great awe at being deeply related to the beginning of the Christian Church, and was feared as the one that carried out punishments on evil cities. Even a Saint or a member of God's Right Seat could not win in a straight fight against an opponent like that. In fact, it was unclear if that archangel could be defeated if every single power of humanity were to work together.

To put it bluntly, that archangel alone held the power to end World War III.

It wasn't an issue of winning or losing.

The war would be "ended" by being thrown into a situation where the war could not continue due to every force in the war being slaughtered.

(I see. So that is why Fiamma has grown so arrogant.)

William Orwell gave his frank assessment.

And even then, his will did not even know how to waver.

(But have you forgotten what I rule over as a member of God's Right Seat?)

Part 5

Cardinal Pietro Yogdis moved from the center of a church in the Vatican to a window. He could not see the situation in Russia from there and he would receive reports from his subordinates who were monitoring it magically. Yet the old man still moved toward the window. He could not help but do so because he had felt the pressure of incredible power.

It was a torrent of divine power.

It was an archangel.

It was Gabriel.

“Ohh…”

A sound of admiration leaked from the Cardinal’s throat. He was surrounded by priests and bishops. Some slowly crossed themselves and others recited verses of the New Testament. They were constantly being watched over by their great Father, but it was rare to be given a chance to feel the strength of that existence. For those pious men, it was a scene where one could shed tears without being ashamed.

But…

Pietro Yogdis held different feelings from the others.

He did not know the details of the plan being carried out by the man behind it all. Nor had he cooperated with him. But he understood what Fiamma of the Right was doing. And if the things he would carry out would work in Pietro Yogdis’s favor, he did not care what they were.

In other words, he just wanted a chance to steal the position of pope.

He just so happened to have the same type of ideas as a certain Russian Orthodox bishop.

(I was a little worried when I saw the records of what the Academy City forces were doing in Russia, but now our victory is more or less confirmed! The papal conclave is beginning as I expected. I will be the one who guides the world as the next pope!!)

Signs of coming riots could be seen all over Italy, but the Cardinal did not care. The sudden change from day to night must have caused quite a bit of chaos. It was the same as how the existence of Halley's Comet had created society-wide unease. However, it did not matter. Roman Catholic agents were hidden among the people to ensure that the rioting did not exceed a certain level and even if it did exceed that level, there was something more important. He had to solidify his own position first. As such, he would send Roman Catholic forces to silence people if need be. Then, there would be no problem. The damages would stay within acceptable bounds and the bodies would be cleaned up along with the rubble. And then Pietro Yogdis would be in the world's closest position to the Lord.

But…

"Cardinal Pietro Yogdis!!"

Suddenly, a warrior priest who looked out of place in that church rushed in.

"It's an emergency!! The papal conclave will be temporarily postponed! We will strengthen the defenses, so you need to get down to safety!!"

"…"

His irritation grew slightly.

He lowered his gaze from the heavens down to the earth. His view of the city of Rome was blocked by thick walls, but he could hear some kind of uproar. It was a riot. It seemed the people who should have just been rioting in Rome had flowed into the Vatican. Apparently, the Roman Catholic agents hidden among the people just were not enough to stop it.

“The papal conclave will continue as planned.”

“B-but…!!”

“Have a Roman Catholic unit suppress them. A mob can be silenced with a baptism of blood. The flow of events here must not be overturned.”

“I can’t do that!! If we give that order, it will be starting a competition!! We can defend against that group, but we cannot aim for them!!”

“What?”

Pietro Yogdis’s expression clouded over.

He could not understand the man’s response. With the pope gone, Cardinals like him should have had the greatest authority. Any order he gave should have been absolute.

But the warrior priest was not obeying him.

The priest expressed the reason why.

“It’s the pope…” He seemed to be squeezing out the words and yet his tone of voice made it sound like he had been waiting for it to happen somewhere in his heart. “The pope calmed the rioting people with a few short words!! He is headed here now! We have no way of stopping him!!”

What the pope had done in the city of Rome had not been anything special.

He had called out to the people, approached, spoke, and given them time to slowly calm down.

That was all.

Normally, someone who had done that would likely have been ganged up on by the 50,000-strong riot. His words could have even caused a catastrophic explosion.

And yet he stood before that special wartime group mentality that had an odd

heat to it and that both saw fighting as the norm and deemed those who stood in their way to be evil.

His words had returned the humanity to all of them. He had not shaken their feelings by any magic means and he had not read some speech calculated to affect their group mentality. The words of a single old man had merely spread throughout the area and then guns and blades were lowered one by one.

Of course, the world was not constructed on a simple balance between good and evil. There were Roman Catholic agents hidden within the people who had fanned the flames of the riot in the direction they wanted. They did not want a chaotic riot to spread, but they deemed the people being silently drawn in by the power of the pope to be even more dangerous. That was why they had tried use a single gunshot to overturn the situation they deemed unfavorable. By applying another stimulus to the calmed crowed, they hoped to bring things back even stronger than before. In a time like that, a simple gunshot was much more effective at creating a large panic than some unknown bit of magic. The Roman Catholic Church had standardized spells that used their great group that numbered up to 2 billion, but they chose a single gunshot for that reason.

And yet…

(No…)

The professional assassins were unable to reach into their pockets. No one was able to aim for and shoot the pope who had calmed the people by saying he would resolve everything.

Fear was at the root of it.

A lead-like weight at the bottom of their guts stopped even the fingers of true assassins.

Those assassins had continued fighting despite their fear countless times, but there was something odd there they had never experienced before.

(The small flow of events this man has created must not be stopped…!!)

And the pope’s advance began.

A large number of people including obvious assassins and not-so-obvious assassins blocked his path. However, the pope said nothing. He made no motions. He merely advanced. With just that, the people created a path for him. Some dropped weapons and spiritual items and a few even made tearful repentances. People started following behind the old man. They were not being ruled by feverish hearts that were full of swirling emotions. They merely walked quietly behind him.

The warrior priests who guarded the main gate into the Vatican crossed themselves upon seeing the pope's return.

A voice prayed that his visit would change things for the better.

The old man continued forward.

Each step was a man's resistance to the great monster that was a world war.

He was fighting to test his worth as a human by using weapons of reason and philanthropy rather than swords and guns.

"…No…"

Pietro Yogdis shook his head as he saw the old man enter the church.

His expression was that of a child about to burst into tears.

"No!!!!! I-I…I will be the next pope!! It has already been decided!! You are nothing but a ghost! There is nothing left for you to do!! K-kill him. It was his fault that the Roman Catholic Church fell into such chaos!! Once I am pope, I promise you I will make you much, much wealthier than you are now!! So kill hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiimmmmmmmmmmmmmm!!"

"…"

"What are you doing!? Warrior priests, what do you think you were given spears for!? Strike your enemy!! Skewer the ignorant masses that follow him, too!! You must!! This is the only way for me to heal this world!!"

"Do not worry." The solemn voice of an old man instantly silenced Pietro Yogdis from his rage. "If you are going to carry out the papal conclave, I have no

intention of stopping you. If you wish for me to take responsibility for the chaos in the church, I will willingly head for gallows. I am no longer the pope. I have come here to stop this war as a single believer named Matthai Reese."

"What…?"

"St. Peter's Basilica was half destroyed by Fiamma, but below it is a great library filled with a vast amount of knowledge that England's Index Librorum Prohibitorum was once guided to. I wish to view what is kept there. A strategy to oppose Fiamma's temple may be sleeping there."

Matthai Reese then stepped forward.

Pietro Yogdis moved back like he was a magnet being affected by an approaching magnet with the same pole pointed toward him. But he soon hit a wall. The old man further approached the Cardinal who was shaking his head.

He would be killed.

That was what he naturally assumed. After what had happened, that was the obvious result. Matthai Reese had no weapon or spiritual item in his hands, but that did not console him even slightly. He knew how skilled the other man was at magic. Without using those things, he could give a single order that would cause the people, the warrior priests, and the bishops to all lose their senses and tear Pietro Yogdis to pieces. In the end, he had no true allies.

And yet…

Matthai Reese placed a hand on Pietro Yogdis's shoulder. That was all. It was a gentle action. The man who had cast aside his title of pope then spoke to the man who had tried to steal it.

"You did a fine job of ruling over two billion followers during these tough times. It was clearly your abilities that allowed everyone here to live on while I slept. As you said, I was an incompetent leader. If it had just been me, the damages would likely have been greater and more widespread."

He was smiling.

It was not an act meant to deceive or a twisted smile filled with irony or scorn.

The simple believer known as Matthai Reese blessed Pietro Yogdis's advancement from the bottom of his heart.

"Call me once the papal conclave begins. I'll vote for you. You took the full brunt of all the pain and made countless extreme decisions to protect everyone's lives, so you have what it takes. I may not be able to do much, but I will help you advance on that path."

After saying that, Matthai Reese quickly turned around.

"This is a fight to make sure you survive, so make sure not to die before this war is over."

Matthai Reese had abandoned his title of pope, but Pietro Yogdis saw everything he desired in that strong back.

Pietro Yogdis had been putting all his efforts into his own fortune, so he was unable to watch that old man head off for a new battlefield where he would fight for those who believed. Instead, he broke down crying.

Part 6

"Sasha Kreutzev…?" Kamijou Touma muttered while sitting on top of her.

He couldn't gather his thoughts.

The archangel being called Misha Kreutzev was even then flying through the artificial night sky and crushing the Academy City forces.

And yet Sasha Kreutzev was before his eyes.

The blonde girl with her slender body bound in that restraint-like outfit looked

slightly puzzled.

“My first question: Why do you know my name?”

“Where do I start…? Umm, I actually met you at the end of August, but it was technically Misha Kreutzev that I met, so I have never directly spoken with you. Anyway, I heard from Kanzaki and Tsuchimikado that the pre-switched out body belonged to someone named Sasha Kreutzev.”

“…”

Before he finished speaking, Sasha twisted her body to roll and shook Kamijou off of her. Kamijou yelled out and suspicious eyes stared at him from behind long bangs.

“My first response: I have decided that I will not get a proper explanation out of you. A supplementary explanation: I have concluded that the odds of you being an enemy are exceedingly high as you are aboard the Star of Bethlehem. You are probably a member of the personnel come to capture me after I fled from the ceremony room.”

She pulled a saw and an L-shaped crowbar from the belt at her waist.

Kamijou’s face paled.

“Wah!! Is this just how you act whether you’re Misha or Sasha!? And what is that angel, anyway!? Is it actually unrelated to you!?”

Kamijou was speaking mostly out of panic, but Sasha fell silent. She took a few steps back in the same way a cautious animal would.

(...It does not change the fact that he is suspicious, but he seems to know something about my “condition”.)

What stood out to her was the mention of the end of August.

At around that time, an odd “condition” had come over Sasha. When she drew near spiritual items or the magic power of others, she felt a pressure in her chest. According to the Russian Orthodox analysts, it was a response to having a large archangel-class power put inside her body.

Sasha glanced down at her torture saw.

(I could make him talk here, but I can't figure out if he is merely an idiot or if he is intentionally making himself sound like he doesn't know what he is talking about. There may be a shorter way to getting the answer I want than just asking him.)

As Sasha silently came up with that plan, Kamijou asked her a question.

"Do you know who Fiamma of the Right is? He's the one who captured you in the Elizalina Alliance and brought you here."

"…?"

"I'm sure he's doing something." Kamijou looked over toward the door of the stone room. "If he wasn't, that monster would not have appeared. Fiamma referred to you as the medium for the angel or something like that. I'll be blunt. Did he use you to call in that angel?"

Summoning an angel.

If you called it that, it might sound kind of stupid. However, Kamijou knew just how fearsome a being like that was. He had seen it magically during the Angel Fall incident at the end of August and scientifically with Fuse Kazakiri on September 30th.

What Fiamma was doing was a threat of that level.

And at the same time, Kamijou knew that an angel was not something so easily controlled. There had to be some sort of foundation. With Misha Kreutzev it had been the magic circle of Angel Fall and with Fuse Kazakiri it had been the AIM diffusion fields. And if it was supported by some kind of large-scale preparations, it would no longer be able to function in that world if he eliminated those preparations.

He knew the key to stopping it.

It was Sasha Kreutzev.

If the appearance of the astounding angel had started with her, she may have

come into contact with some kind of important spiritual item. Assuming there was something like that, Sasha might know what he had to destroy in order to stop the angel.

“Listen. Anything you know is fine. I need to know where the magic—do you call it a ceremony in this case?—anyway, the place on the Star of Bethlehem where the actions to call in the angel were carried out. And I need to know the process as well. Don’t worry, I don’t need anything detailed. I just want to know what tools were used and in what way.”

Of course, Kamijou did not have a good understanding of magic.

However, his right hand could negate and destroy any phenomena or items related to supernatural powers whether he understood them or not. If he just destroyed everything Sasha mentioned, he might be able to destroy Misha.

Of course, Sasha was still suspicious of Kamijou.

However, she could feel the vibrations from the archangel flying around and sending large-scale attacks toward the Academy City forces in the sky and on the ground. As what they wanted seemed to be the same, Sasha started speaking.

“…My second response: When I awoke, the ceremony was already complete. That may have been why I was able to escape. A few Russian Orthodox magicians are here in addition to the leader, so I normally would have been unable to escape. However, I rushed out of the ceremony room right when they were relaxing over having gotten past one of their major difficulties.”

“That’s fine. Did you see anything in the ceremony room before you fled?”

Kamijou doubted Fiamma would leave an opening like that and he also wasn’t sure if you could really “flee” from him as he could fill in a gap of a few kilometers in an instant, but he didn’t mention either thought. Perhaps Fiamma had determined that there was nowhere to escape to while trapped on that sky fortress.

Sasha seemed not to have noticed Kamijou’s thoughts and she continued.

“My third response: The ceremony room was in the Christian style. It was oddly made with an especial focus on the great element of fire… Other than when

using one to its extreme as an attack, ceremonies usually gain an effect by using all four great elements together, but that man known as Fiamma's ceremony room was exceedingly uniform in that one color…"

Her explanation continued.

However, Kamijou suddenly looked down at his right hand.

There might be another way.

Fiamma had used Sasha to call out that archangel. This time, the pure archangel was exposed externally rather than residing within Sasha like it had during Angel Fall. But if Misha had been called out using Sasha, then the odds were good that the same set of rules would apply. Sasha was necessary to stabilize the existence of the archangel.

If so, Sasha and Misha might be connected like someone having an out-of-body experience. If that were the case, Kamijou could use Imagine Breaker. By touching Sasha, he might be able to directly damage Misha. After all, it seemed angels were giant masses of magical power.

(…Even now, Misha Kreutzev is doing all sorts of damage to the area. Academy City forces, Russian forces, and maybe even surrounding villages are being damaged.)

Kamijou opened and closed his right hand as if seeing how it was doing.

(So I need to try everything I can. We're the only ones that can do anything right now!!)

"A supplementary explanation: The ceremony room is on the rightmost end of the Star of Bethlehem from the perspective of the direction it is travelling in. Most likely, that location is used to signify the Archangel Michael who symbolizes fire. It is a very thorough method, but the angel flying around the battlefield is Gabriel. Gabriel signifies water which seems quite odd to me as—Hyawan!?"

Suddenly, Sasha's back stiffened and she let out an odd shout.

It was because Kamijou had stretched out his arm and touched her cheek.

Not noticing that Sasha had begun to tremble, Kamijou then touched her head, her shoulders, her sides, her stomach, her thighs, and so on.

"…No. Not here either. Or here. Or here. Dammit, there's no change in Misha. Is this method not going to work? I guess I'll test her back as well just to be sure. And what's with this crazy outfit…?"

"…"

As Kamijou muttered to himself, Sasha silently swung around her L-shaped crowbar.

As if she were striking him with the back of a sword, she got a nice clean hit with the horizontal strike. The corner that bent at a right angle struck Kamijou in the temple.

"…My second question: Do you possess the same soul as Vasilisa?"

"Gyabh!? What? Cough! What's a Vasilisa!?" Kamijou vaguely shouted as he rolled around on the floor with his arms and legs twitching.

Sasha swung down the corner of the crowbar twice more, but she must have decided that beating him beyond repair would not get her anywhere because she put the instrument of torture back in her belt while blushing profusely.

"My fourth response: This Fiamma person's ceremony room was quite high class, but the spiritual items used were quite popular ones. I do not believe that he could control an existence on the level of an angel with what I saw."

It was possible the special item was Sasha herself and tools with normal functionality were all that was needed to draw out her functionality.

"However…A supplementary explanation: There was a single spiritual item I had never seen before."

"A spiritual item!?" Kamijou repeated.

It may have had to do with Index's remote control spiritual item.

"My fifth response: Specifically, it was a staff. No, the symbolic weapon of fire is the rod or the staff, so that in itself is not surprising."

"So what made it stand out to you?"

"A supplementary explanation: Normally a staff being used as the symbolic weapon of fire is made from a red-colored main body with a bar magnet on the end. However, this staff had something else there."

"?"

"A further supplementary explanation: It was a cylinder about the size to hold in one's hand with many different thin rings on its side. It was reminiscent of a dial padlock. It was placed at the center of the ceremony room."

"…"

Kamijou knew that spiritual item.

It was Index's remote control spiritual item.

Kamijou initially assumed Fiamma must have used the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires to summon Misha Kreutzev, but then he noticed something odd about Sasha's explanation.

Fiamma had controlled Index by operating the spiritual item in his hand. He should just been able to get the information he needed that way.

Why had he gone out of his way to use it as a part of the staff?

Kamijou thought for a bit and then spoke.

"Is he controlling Misha Kreutzev by using the spiritual item's ability to control someone remotely?"

Part 7

“So things are finally turning around,” muttered Russian Orthodox Bishop Nikolai Tolstoy within a Moscow palace.

He was holding a communications spiritual item in the form of a book.

It was connected with Fiamma of the Right.

“The appearance of Misha Kreutzev has been confirmed even here. I cannot believe that you can keep all that Telesma in one place. Of course, it is not a problem as it can be used to fight in this war. Hurry up and have Misha Kreutzev crush the Academy City forces.”

Nikolai had a great number of maps and documents spread out on the table before him.

“The vast majority of their forces are unmanned units using AI and remote controls. Start by destroying this command location. Top priority goes to destroying the EU war front pressing in towards Moscow from Eastern Europe. Once that is over, eliminate the aerial forces passing over the Arctic Ocean. I will send you the maps and movements of the troops. Once you see them—”

“Heh heh.”

At that time, Nikolai clearly heard Fiamma laughing.

“You have the incomplete archangel of water in your grasp and that is all you can think of?”

“What are you saying?”

“Now I can see why you only made it up to bishop. There are many irrational things in this world, but that seems to be correct. The position of Patriarch does not suit you. The church would certainly begin to fall apart.”

“What are you saying, Fiamma!?” Nikolai yelled back after being jabbed straight

in his complex.

However, there was no change.

Fiamma of the Right's laughter did not stop.

"Hey, Nikolai. Did you think I of all people was using what I had at my disposal for the sake of Russia? Of course I wasn't. If anything, it was the opposite."

"You bastard…"

"I use what I have at my disposal for my own goals. Buying time is difficult, Bishop Nikolai Tolstoy. And a role like that *does* suit you. Now you can just fight Academy City on your own and be destroyed on your own."

"Heh."

Nikolai's emotions exploded.

However, the primary emotion was not rage.

It was joy at seeing that what he had prepared for just such a moment had not gone to waste.

"Are you an idiot, Fiamma!? You have made a fundamental mistake! Did you forget that your floating fortress was created with Russian Orthodox spells!?"

"…"

"The 200 magicians I sent to you were all acting as my pawns. Did you think I would not add in any tricks? With a single order from me, that fortress will immediately fall apart and the countless parts will rain down on the surface."

While members of God's Right Seat could use special magic normal people could not, they could not use the spells that normal magicians could. That was one of the reasons Fiamma had asked for help from Russian Orthodox magicians. In other words, normal spells were necessary for the construction of that fortress.

And the same applied to the removal of the traps Nikolai had made sure were

mixed in with the construction spells.

“What will you do, Fiamma?” Nikolai asked in a teasing manner.

That man continued to rise in position by taking advantage of any situation, so he was used to that kind of strategy.

“I don’t know what you want to use that fortress for, but it must be a necessary part of your plan since you took such meticulous care in getting it up there. Can you really let it be destroyed?”

Nikolai knew he had won.

He had the absolute advantage.

“If you go along with what we in Russia want, that fortress will not be destroyed. I’m just saying that things have an order of priority, Fiamma. Russia comes first. If you have time left over after that, then you can carry out your own plan. Of course, that’s only if it does not cause Russia any trouble.”

“Ha ha,” Fiamma laughed quietly.

Nikolai frowned.

That wasn’t what he had expected.

That had not been a laugh of desperation. Fiamma had uttered the type of laugh that one gave after hearing a bad joke.

In other words, it had been a sarcastic laugh.

“If that was the only plan you could come up with, then you aren’t even fit for the position of bishop.”

Immediately afterwards, a sound like some kind of fiber being ripped apart filled Nikolai’s ears. He had a bad feeling. The magical lines needed to disassemble the fortress’s construction spells were being severed.

“A mere member of God’s Right Seat cannot use normal spells. While that’s true, it doesn’t add up, does it? After all, why do you think I attacked England in

order to gain the remote control spiritual item for the 103,000 grimoires?”

“You don’t mean…?”

His throat went dry.

He could feel the advantage he thought he had slipping from his hand like a lively fish.

“Of the four great elements, I rule over fire, but it does not end there. I have determined that each of the four great elements is at the farthest point in its directions but also has the other elements within it. I have gathered everything I need to use magic.”

“You can use it…? You can use magic other than your power as a member of God’s Right Seat!?”

“While all that did have to be detached in order to become The One Above God, it’s basically an issue of using the right thing at the right time. If you divide things up appropriately, it is not impossible to store up knowledge as a human. And once it is all complete, the sacred light will naturally wipe away the human knowledge like the puny darkness it is.”

Fiamma continued speaking in order to finish off the shallow bishop.

“In other words, my request for magicians was a means of gaining knowledge of the techniques for the necessary spells and to make you Russians lower your guard. …So unfortunately for you, your role ends here. The lifeline you tried to cling to has just been destroyed. I’ll take care of the 200 magicians, so don’t worry about that. Just accept defeat.”

The connection ended.

It had been severed from the other side.

Nikolai felt as if he could clearly see the difference in value between himself and Fiamma. One was the head of God’s Right Seat, an organization that could influence the fate of the world. The other was just one of many disposable bishops.

Nikolai Tolstoy thought about that for a bit.

And then he completely exploded with rage.

He threw the book-shaped communications spiritual item onto the table and grabbed a cell phone. The phone had a chip for encrypted communications used by high-level government officials. As he operated the phone, he gave an order to a subordinate.

“Bring out the ‘reserves’.”

That word held dreadful meaning.

Nikolai ignored how much of a dilemma that order would put Russia into as he yelled.

“Blow that fortress away!! Now!!”

Part 8

Index and Stiyl’s battle continued within St. George’s Cathedral.

However, the battle was not an equal one.

There was no way a mere magician like Stiyl could be a good match for the grimoire library who could freely use 103,000 grimoires.

“Chapter 13, Verse 9. Maintaining my reach with projectiles.”

The red wings on Index’s back burst off.

The dancing red lights that were like sprays of blood flew towards Stiyl like

lasers. It wasn’t just one or two shots. Dozens of attacks came from countless angles at the same time.

“…!!”

Stiyl was not immediately killed due to the blessing of the area he was in.

Because the floor on the first floor had collapsed, Stiyl had fallen into the underground spiritual item vault.

He immediately grabbed a spiritual item and passed magic power through it which activated it.

The block-shaped stone named Hrungnir’s Stone glowed bluish-white and successfully repelled four of the red lights Index had fired.

The remaining ones flooded in and destroyed the bluish-white light and the spiritual item itself.

Stiyl barely managed to evade the killer beams of light by twisting his body.

(From what I can see, the control of her physical body is being carried out by her brain. The remote control spiritual item is only used to send out the necessary signals to her body which input the necessary parameters for her movement. In that case, Index’s movements should stop if I knock her unconscious.)

He hated having to put more of a burden on her, but he had no choice. Stiyl checked on the rune cards in his pocket. They weren’t all flame ones. With a focus on people clearing fields, he had cards that created other effects. Depending on the arrangement, he could create many different effects and some of those effects involved mentally binding a specific person.

He had been postponing using it because he couldn’t calculate the risk to her without knowing how the remote control spiritual item worked, but he could not put it off any longer. He needed to quickly incapacitate Index and mentally bind her.

The problem was…

(How am I supposed to get close to her with these constant attacks!?)

At that very moment, a great noise resounded throughout the area.

It was the sound of the door to the underground spiritual item vault being thrown open and a number of nuns rushing in.

“Stiyl, we’ll cover you!! Make your preparations!!”

“Stop!!” Stiyl yelled out, but it was too late.

“Chapter 8, Verse 43. Refinement of magic power detected. Those holding the power within them are recognized as enemies. Commencing elimination of their actions.”

Sparks flew from Index’s forehead.

Immediately afterwards, a huge fan-shaped shockwave shot out. The nuns were protected by spiritual items to a certain extent, but they were completely blown away. The door to the underground spiritual item vault was destroyed and Index’s enemies were pushed away as if by a bulldozer.

(The primary battle members have gone to the Strait of Dover or overseas. Most of the people still here deal with transmissions and communications. They’ll all be defeated at this rate!!)

Index looked around the area.

She looked at the walls and the ceiling…and she detected the magic power beyond them.

“Chapter 8, Verse 47. Beginning elimination of all elements likely to help the enemy.”

She fired thick beams again and again. They mercilessly pierced straight through the walls and ceiling that were protected magically and destroyed the magical constructions within St. George’s Cathedral.

(This is bad. At this rate, the large scale spiritual items supporting those on the front lines could be damaged!!)

At that time, Stiyl saw someone standing at the edge of the destroyed portion of

the ceiling. It was Laura Stuart, the Archbishop at the top of the Anglican Church.

(Is she here to help…?)

Stiyl had a slight hope, but he realized he was wrong immediately afterwards.

She lightly waved her hand showing something off.

(That's her remote control spiritual item!!)

Of course she was not there to help.

What she was wordlessly expression was rather simple: If you don't do something soon, I'll use this.

Stiyl gritted his teeth.

He had a pretty good idea what would happen to Index if the burden of the remote control spiritual item being used were added on top the burden she already had.

He pulled a rune card from his pocket and forced magic power through it.

A flame sword appeared.

As if drawn in by it, Index turned her gaze in his direction.

"Chapter 20, Verse 6. Top priority target reset. Reanalysis of the highly dangerous element complete."

After waiting for his opponent's focus to be drawn to him, Stiyl ran for the underground spiritual item vault's exit. Staying there would increase the damage done. He had to start by bringing her to a more suitable battlefield.

Stiyl heard the girl's merciless voice from behind him.

"Preparations complete. Commencing attack."

Between the Lines 5

Misaka Mikoto looked above while standing atop a snowy plain.

It seemed the giant fortress that spiky-haired boy was on was rising even further. She had come all the way to Russia, but she now had no way to meet up with him.

(…Ahh!! I can't just be left out after coming this far!! I need to think of a way to get up there!!)

It seemed clear to her that the spiky-haired boy was at the center of that giant disturbance known as World War III. Part of her was amazed at the difference in the scale of the things that idiot was involved in, but she would drag him down to a safe place before lecturing him.

The Sister next to her then spoke up.

"What is that frog strap sticking out of your jacket's pocket? asks Misaka brimming with curiosity."

"Ahn? It's Gekota. I got it from a cell phone campaign I dragged that idiot to on September 30th."

"…With #10032's necklace and that strap, it really seems like the Academy City group has an advantage, says Misaka hinting at her need to reformulate her strategy. Long distance is tough."

"Um, strategy?"

Mikoto blinked repeatedly, but the Sister holding a Russian assault rifle like it was a stuffed animal did not explain further.

She instead looked up toward the fortress.

"It seems you want to somehow assist him, says Misaka as she suggests a topic of discussion."

“…Well, I do, but the problem is how to get up there. It looks like it’s up to about 5000 meters now. I just can’t get that high with my magnetism.”

“Would it be possible to prepare a number of relay points in the air and then raise your altitude in steps? asks Misaka putting forth a random idea.”

“How?” Mikoto asked and the Sister looked around the area.

She then pointed toward a half-destroyed Russian short-range missile launcher vehicle.

“First fire that missile.”

“I’d die,” Mikoto responded immediately. “But a normal military helicopter probably wouldn’t get me all the way up there. They aren’t airtight and it looks like that fortress is still rising. If I’m really going to go, I guess I’ll need an airplane.”

“(…This could be my big chance to blast away my long distance handicap by gallantly appearing just when his situation seems impossible, says Misaka as she chuckles and begins leaking horrible delusions into the network.)”

“Hey, I can hear everything you’re saying,” said Misaka in exasperation, but the Sister’s head suddenly shot up.

She started to focus on her headset radio.

“Misaka has intercepted a Russian transmission, reports Misaka. The encryption is different from the usual one for their vehicles. Someone named Nikolai Tolstoy is mentioned quite a few times, but this is probably a transmission from an independent unit, conjectures Misaka.”

“?”

“It seems a large scale attack from the surface is going to be carried out against the floating fortress in the sky, says Misaka summarizing the contents.”

“Hmm. That isn’t good. That sounds like that idiot could get wrapped up in it.”

She honestly did not care what happened to the strange fortress, but she didn't want an acquaintance to be blown up along with it. Finding a way to reach the fortress was important, but she had to stop the attack on it from the surface first.

"So what kind of weapon are they going to be using? They were at least firing short-range surface-to-air missiles before, but I doubt those would do anything to that thing."

"Nu-AD1967."

"What is that?"

"That is the American name for it, says Misaka continuing her explanation. It seems it is called an Opasnosti here, says Misaka as she listens carefully to the transmission."

"But what is it?"

"It is a former Soviet Union strategic nuclear warhead, reports Misaka."

Chapter 8: Their Many-Sided Counterattack. *Combination.*

Part 1

Misha Kreutzev.

The shape of the angel's body was not unusual. It looked just like the body of a 20-something year old woman. Unmistakably this was Gabriel, the only angel in Christian lore said to have female attributes.

But when you looked closer, you could see that she was not human.

The entire surface of her body was covered by slippery cloth of an unknown material, her face had no eyes or nostrils, only shapes that superficially resembled such parts created from the ridges and depressions across the surface of the cloth. The cloth spread out around the back of her head in a way as to resemble hair.

There was no noticeable difference between the "skin" and the "clothing", the two seemingly blended into one. What looked like gold leaf veins ran across the white cloth surface and occasional identical colored pins held them in place.

The overall color of her attire was more grey than white, but a bluish glow radiated outwards from her entire body, not unlike the glow of a computer screen.

Wings of ice.

About a hundred of them. The sizes ranged from a few dozen meters to well over one hundred meters in length. They resembled nothing less than countless

gigantic swords of ice piercing through the sky. The beauty of the crystalline wings was similar to the beauty precious gems like diamonds held for humans.

But.

Throughout the frozen landscape of Russia, all the Academy City troops who beheld the sight of the archangel were not mesmerized by its beauty. For they knew the horror of that shape. No, rather, they had been forced to learn firsthand the horror that was the Power of God.

BOOM!

Flapping those countless wings of ice, Misha flew down at the snowy landscape. The angel's movements were simple and direct: fly straight down towards the closely packed armor divisions of Academy City, and as she crashes into the ground like a meteor, pound the ground around her with hundreds of wings of ice. With this crude but efficient method of attack that resembled nothing more than a giant stamp descending on the land, Misha crushed the Academy City troops, who had effortlessly defeated the mighty Russian army, like a bunch of ants.

"UWAAAA!!!!"

"RETREAT! WE'RE TOO CLOSE!!!"

"WHAT THE HELL IS THIS THING?!!"

The surviving tanks retreated furiously, turned their turrets to aim at the angel, and fired. The sound of the cannon fire felt as though it would shake up one's inner organs into a mess, and multiple armor piercing explosive rounds rent the air as they flew towards their target.

Misha didn't even bother to turn.

The wings that were like towers of steel flapped once, faster than the speed of sound. With this one supersonic flap, the air was compressed into a wall of wind that knocked the tank rounds away as if they were nothing. Misha did not continue the attack, for she did not adhere to battle tactics concerning victory or defeat.

“anhwrREPEATnxdp”

Whoosh! Before the deflected tank rounds exploded, Misha was already 1000 meters above the ground again. With the current situation the troops were in, they would not survive another assault. The surviving troops were scattered around the perimeter of the giant crater that formed from Misha’s first attack. Misha chose her target. And just like before, Misha dived towards the ground at horrifying speeds.

“nipsergREPEATnsig”

“sbrgREPEATsmntph”

“nithgREPEATgbsvrfl”

Just like that, Misha continued to literally stamp the Academy City troops out of existence. Misha had no concept of “friend” or “foe” and as such, even the Russian tanks and troops milling around on the surface were crushed into oblivion.

It was a scene of total destruction. A crewman emerged from the crushed hull of an Academy City tank, only to come face to face with a Russian soldier who was almost fainting from exhaustion. However neither pointed their gun at each other. The Russian soldier just stared up at the sky, dazed, and the Academy City trooper completely understood what was going through the Russian soldier’s mind.

This was not a war anymore. The term “war” was just one of the many aspects of human life. This was a true apocalypse. In front of an apocalyptic event such as this, humans were powerless.

“hbsugneznzfREPEATsboisnegrgrer”

This was what the angel was speaking. The human ear could not hear it, nor could their minds understand it. The sound was just like if one’s throat had been pierced with a knife. As the troops looked skywards, the angel of destruction would come crashing down. Misha’s movements did not change, not even her attack patterns. It seemed as though, to the angel, all this was just a boring chore to be done as fast as possible. The soldiers staring up at the angel knew that when Misha’s face turned towards them, death would come to them in an instant

as she crashed down on top of them like a falling star. We're next. They would think. To survive up till now was already a miracle. Our luck must have been used up already.

"..."

The tank crewman sat resignedly on the ground, and gave a faint smile of defeat. The expression of the Russian soldier was identical. The next instant the angel came crashing down. Mercilessly. Its goal, to kill all life on the frozen tundra.

BOOM! The sound of the explosion echoed across the land. However, this sound was not caused by Misha impacting against the ground, but was caused by a person colliding with the archangel.

The Russian and the Academy City crewman could not understand what was happening. They hadn't even registered the fact that they were still alive. The one fighting the archangel was a….. girl?

A blonde girl clothed in a fiery red dress, wielding a shining sword of light in her right hand. 3000 meters above in the sky, far beyond the habitat of humans, this girl flew around like a rocket, fighting the archangel. For the first time, Misha changed her course. She headed for the ground, slowing down. This time, there was no gigantic explosion and no crater formed. Misha bounced once, twice, three times on the ground, before stopping herself by thrusting her countless wings into the ground around her. Around her, the remnants of the two armies struggled frantically to run away.

What was this?

What happened?

Even though the Academy City troops were moving again, before Misha could have time to ponder these questions, the woman in red who had assaulted Misha in the sky landed close to where the tanks were.

She did not have a parachute. Rather, she just floated down towards the ground, as if on invisible wings.

"Wha-what?"

The tank crewman sat on his buttocks, shivering in fear as the woman in red landed behind him. However she paid him no heed. Focusing only on the archangel, she casually swung around her sword of light. Focusing only on that horrible figure whom the soldier didn't want to look at for even one second.

"Sigh, even though they said the Power of God was summoned, this being is no different from your run of the mill monster… I wanted to meet a real angel and ask them about some of heaven's secrets, but it looks like this…. thing won't be able to understand even simple language…"

The woman said disdainfully. And then…

"Even if you're a princess, how about you show some self-control? ...Not that I'm one to talk seeing as I let you convince me to come to this place that even Napoleon would give up on."

"Wh-when did they come and where did they come from?"

After hearing this second voice, the tank crewman turned his head, and saw a pale faced woman dressed in white. And she was not alone.

"Now that I think about it, for the conflict to erupt now just signifies how serious the situation has become. As expected, the enemy has prepared a trump card on the same level as, no, superior to Curtana…"

This time it was a man's voice, a very tall man dressed in a Western suit standing in front of several thousand people. It was hard to believe that they were there, for the surroundings had nowhere near enough cover to have hidden all those people…

For the man in the suit, now should not be the ideal time to be listening to the back and forth insults of the woman in red and the pale-faced girl, but still, he traded opinions with them.

"Is your Spell of Thororm ineffective against it?"

"The bad news is, it seems the gap between us is too big. And those ice wings may not even be weapons, but just an extension of its body."

"What is Necessarius doing? Why don't they send over that Saint?"

“For her, aiding the wounded for both the Academy City and the Russian troops would be her highest priority. For her, fighting is just another method of saving people, and in this situation, ‘finding another way to stop this war’ would be more important.”

Hearing Knight Leader’s words, Carissa bit her lip. The Holy Woman of Versailles raised her eyebrows.

“For the Anglicans, this would be normal, wouldn’t it?”

Ignoring the glare of the Second Princess Carissa, the Holy Woman of Versailles continued.

“Up till now the Anglicans have killed too many people…”

“I know that even without you telling me…” Carissa snapped back.

“Hmph, in the end we’ll just have to think of a way to bring this thing down.”

Vroom! Once again, the sword of light slashed the air. Facing the pale-faced girl carrying that over-ornamented sword, Carissa spoke.

“Come on, you Frenchie, let’s go.”

“Hmph, ever since I channelled all of France’s power into Durendal, I’ve been dying to use it on that thing.”

An unearthly noise echoed across the land, as Misha started to pull her wings of ice out of the ground. Carissa pointed her sword of light at the angel, and spoke in a commanding voice.

“Come, you beast. I’ll show you that I too, wield the power of an archangel!!”

Part 2

The second princess of England, Carissa.

The holy maiden of France, the Holy Woman of Versailles.

Their battle plan was simple. Charge at Misha Kreutzev and initiate a full on frontal attack.

BOOM!

The sound of the explosion was slower than the movement of the two on the battlefield. In reality the sound wasn't an explosion at all, but a supersonic boom caused by the two women's charge. The two of them swept towards Misha Kreutzev in a pincer attack formation. Like a giant pair of scissors, they aimed for her head.

All eyes were on the two as they rushed at the archangel, burying their swords into the mass of frozen wings. In an instant, Misha came impossibly close to the verge of death, as the two's blades cleaved through her countless wings like lawn-mowers cutting through grass.

Then, Misha's hands moved outwards.

Like the movement of subway doors closing, she curled her fingers into fists.

A very simple movement.

A moment earlier Curtana and Durendal had been cutting through the frozen wings of death, and now they could not even scratch the palm of the archangel's hands. The two blades had been stopped completely. Misha slowly turned, and her eyeless sockets seemed to stare at Carissa.

BOOM!

Another explosion, this time from Carissa and the Holy Woman of Versailles releasing explosive energy from their swords to escape from Misha's grasp. Although they did not fall over, they skidded back a large distance from the force of their explosions, their hands still numb from it.

"hboirgFIRSTnbugbPRIORITYvoraghv"

Misha Kreutzev tilted her head slightly as she spoke and she turned her body toward Carissa.

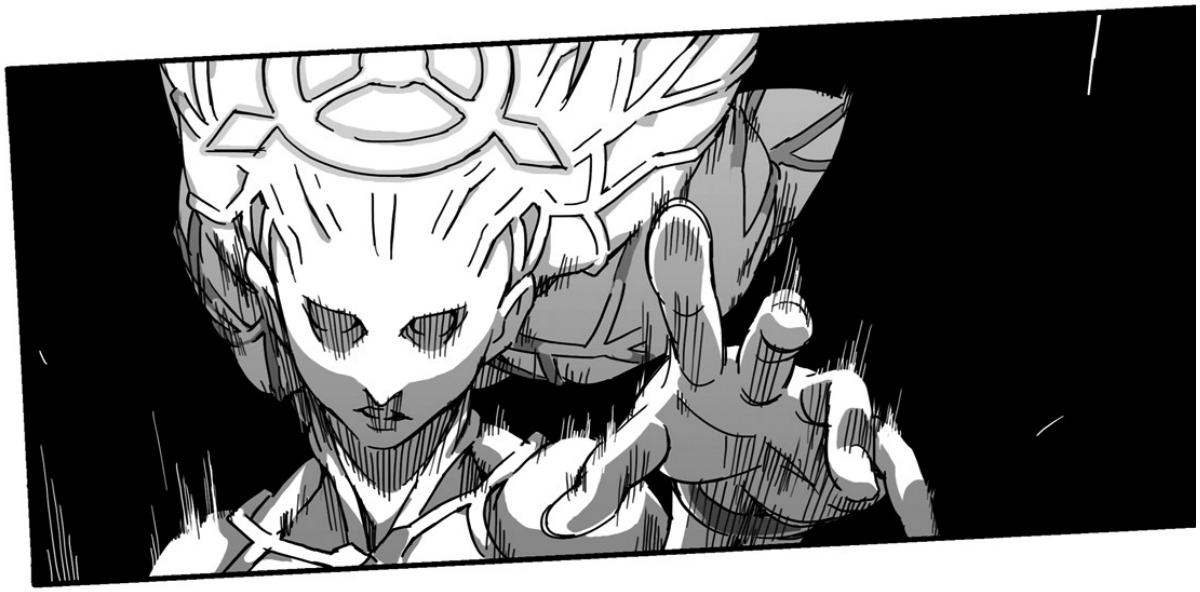
“nriosgnATTACKiorseorg”

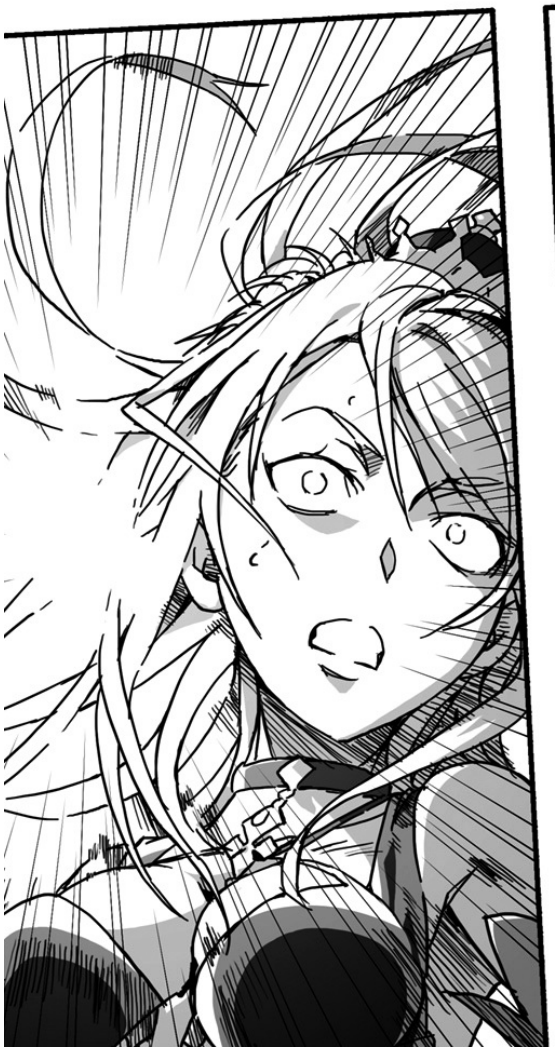
Misha raised her palm.

Something happened.

WHOOSH!!

Something flew past Carissa’s face, and the mountain behind her was vaporized. She could not react at all. Misha realized this, and readjusted her aim, moving her palm a little bit.





“GET OUT OF THE WAY YOU BARBARIAN!”

The instant before the shot was fired, the Holy Woman of Versailles moved at supersonic speeds. Circling around from the back of Misha, she kicked out at Carissa from the sides, knocking her away to safety. For most people such a humiliating treatment would have had the two engage in fierce battle, but for those two, this would be considered an act of kindness.

The two girls got out of the way just as Misha fired that “thing” from her hand.

Snow and dirt flew everywhere, but the two were unharmed.

“What is that? I can’t see it at all…”

“The Power of God is a messenger angel. She must be good at manipulating information. She must be obscuring our sixth senses of premonition and intuition. It seems like we can only rely on our 5 normal senses for this fight…”

“hbwioraATTACKnbsitbgEFFECTIVEorargwerge.”

“That’s no good, it seems like she’s got a loose tongue now.”

“It’s your fault for allowing her to become so cocky you barbarian.”

CRACK!

The wings of ice on Misha’s back began to expand. The two girls were filled with a sense of foreboding. It seemed to be similar to the attack Misha fired from her palms, the purpose of the wings most likely was to disrupt one’s sixth sense.

The two were at a disadvantage.

If they were to launch an attack without the capability to read the movements of the enemy, they would be cut down for sure. But at the same time, they were unable to react to the enemy’s attacks and were completely defenseless. Just as the two prepared themselves for the inevitable, the wings of ice moved. Over one hundred wings moved in unison towards the pair at over supersonic speeds.

“-!!”

RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT!!!

Innumerable sparks flew. The situation was just like being fired at by a Gatling gun shooting at 6000 rounds per minute. The girls' faces were pale as they dodged the countless projectiles. Even though their physical capabilities were far beyond normal humans, without their sixth sense, the chances of dodging such a barrage for an extended period of time were nil.

Even if a chance was to appear for them to launch a counterattack, they did not have the energy left to mount an assault. Dodging Misha's attack was eating through their stamina. This was a completely unfavorable situation for them; they could not find an opening at all.

"What are you doing you barbarian?! Didn't you say Curtana had the power of an archangel just like the enemy?"

"That's just on paper! It's not a problem of 'power' but a problem of 'technique' and 'knowledge'. If you haven't noticed, I'm not an archangel! I can't compete with a real archangel! What about your Durendal?"

"Just relying on the power of the 'artifact' is not enough! Remember, our goal is the impossible dream of taking down an archangel!"

SCREECH!

The sound of something scraping together. That depression in Misha's face where her mouth should be moved ever so slightly.

"bhrovINCREASEgbATTACKeoiwvpghSPEEDrug"

"This bastard! She still has energy left-!!"

Carissa wore an expression of shock, as Misha's movements far exceeded her calculations. Over a hundred wings of ice, directed not at her and the Holy Woman, but rather, at the surviving Russian and Academy City soldiers.

"That bastard!"

As fast as she could, the second princess of England moved at supersonic speeds, putting herself between the archangel and the surviving troops. To save

the lives of innocent people from the wrath of an archangel, she put her life on the line. Misha Kreutzev struck without mercy, for this was the moment she had been waiting for. The entire landscape shuddered with the impact.

Carissa clenched her teeth, blood coming out from her mouth. She could hear the sound of bones breaking. Even though she used Curtana Second to take the brunt of the attack, the force of the wings pressing her into the ground made her fear for her life. She thought that she would be squished to death, intestines spilling out all over the place. However the scariest part wasn't that. In the bleeding palm of Carissa's hand, the shard of Curtana Second had shattered under the immense pressure.

"bndgCONFIRMEDeworiEFFECTIVE"

Misha coldly spoke. Once again, hundreds of frozen wings crashed down. This time, Carissa did not have the sword of light in her hands. Even the shard of Curtana Second from which the blade was formed had gone.

This time, even the sound vanished.

Everyone watched speechless. The Holy Woman of Versailles and her French forces, the English forces led by Knight Leader, plus the Russians and Academy City troops for whom magic was not even a confirmed existence yet. All stopped their motions. However, this reaction was not towards the destructive power of Misha Kreutzev.

"….yes, my sword is created by using the power of the Curtana Second shard to borrow the power of England's warriors. If the shard is broken, this power vanishes."

The voice of the girl in red echoed across the land. The voice of the second princess of England, who governed all 'military affairs'.

"However, who said one was only limited to possessing one shard of Curtana Second?!"

VROOM!

The blade of light reignited. Or more correctly, *blades* of light, for Carissa was wielding dual swords of light now. Around her waist, ten more shards were tied

in a belt.

“As a princess who gambled the fate of her own country in this war, I shall not go down so easily!”

“hdtrnDAMAGEbgurgCONFIRMEDhtr”

With a high pitched noise, Misha repositioned all of her ice wings at once.

“bauoCONTINUEgrlnATTACKjjyhbasedfvgCERTAINtgseagtrrhgsDESTRUCTIONyr”

Carissa smiled coldly. Even though she was horribly injured, her legs shaking, her smile would not go away. Next to her, the Holy Woman called out.

“How long do you think we have to hold out for?”

Behind them, the soldiers were in retreat. No matter if they were Russian or from Academy City, with the aid of the British and French troops, they quickly made their escape from the battlefield. Survivors were rescued from crushed vehicles, and the injured were placed on those that could still move.

“We have to hold until they reach someplace safe. If even the other side of the earth is not safe, then we hold until then.”

“You’re remarkably calm.”

“Heh, I don’t know about that.”

Once again, the two women engaged the archangel in combat. Both Carissa and the Holy Woman were not without injuries. Faced against the supersonic wings of the angel, and stripped of their sixth sense, even as they dodged fatal blows, their bodies steadily collected minor wounds. They were injured more by shards of broken ice than by the direct blow of one of the massive wings.

As it was, it was impossible for them to have come out unharmed. The two of them had already used up most of their energy and their movements were visibly slower. If the battle dragged on, they were sure to receive a fatal blow in the end. However, even if they wanted to commit suicide, the girls did not venture directly in front of Misha. Instead, they pulled back a small distance away for a

breather.

“Now….”

From between her breasts, Carissa took out a small communications device.

“I still value my life, so I think it is time for Plan B.”

“….Could you not hide stuff in that sort of place? As another member of the same sex I think you have very serious problems.”

Ignoring her, Carissa spoke into the device.

“All missile squads are to be on standby, ready to launch the surface-to-air missiles.”

Behind a hill some 5 kilometers away, various trucks with missile launchers and radar arrays mounted on them were congregated. The most important were the trucks with mounts containing 20 cylindrical missile launchers. The attack was not a scenery-destroying launch of one or two missiles. Each missile truck fired their payload of 20 missiles. Their jet trails leaving white streaks in the air, over one hundred missiles soared into the sky.

At first, Misha did not even turn her head to observe the launch. Most likely she did not regard them as a threat. But very soon she realized the circumstances. These missiles were SAMs, surface-to-air missiles. That is, they were not targeted at Misha who was on the ground, but rather, the giant aerial target that was the Star of Bethlehem.

“Although I don’t know if you understand our language, let me say a word.”

Carissa flourished her sword, a wicked smile on her face.

“Are you sure you should be lazing around here? Defending that place, shouldn’t that be your highest priority?”

“bruzeroiutgLOSSraoijcng”

“Aw, don’t be mad.”

Faced with the killing intent radiating from the angel, Carissa spoke casually.

“After all, wasn’t this the tactic you used just before?”

BOOM!

The sound of an explosion. The archangel had aimed a small explosion at the ground. Carissa and the Holy Woman of Versailles instantly were on guard, leaping back to put distance between themselves and Misha. There was not enough time for them to get back in formation. Misha Kreutzev looked up at the sky, and with one flap flew up into the air. Like a rocket she flew towards the Star of Bethlehem to intercept the SAMs. The Holy Woman of Versailles lowered Durendal, looking at the scene.

“I don’t think that level of bombardment will be able to down the flying fortress.”

“Even if it only knocks it off course, that is enough. Angels are angels, they have to follow their orders. They judge and move according to their orders. It is easy to guess that the angel’s highest priority is to guard that flying fortress vital to her master’s plan.”

As Carissa spoke, she wavered unsteadily on her feet.

“Hmph, it seems the price I paid was higher than I expected”

Because of her fight with such an unnatural being such as an archangel, and the strain of having to maintain the power output of Curtana Second, her body was at its limits. However, she could not retreat here. War was not such a simple thing, and the second princess of England in charge of ‘military affairs’ knew this well.

“SAMs are also a resource of the country, we don’t have an unlimited supply of them. We can’t expect to occupy her forever. Take the chance now to retreat the injured.”

After ordering her subordinates with the communications device, Carissa fell into deep thought.

“That damn monster…”

She coughed up the blood that was starting to coagulate in her throat. The sword of light that the second princess of England held was a national treasure that held immense power. However, it was still a man-made item holding man-made power. Compared with the power of a true archangel it was nothing.

“How will we deal with that thing… I see no way how it can be defeated by mere humans…”

Part 3

Tremors could be felt throughout the entirety of the floating fortress Star of Bethlehem.

Kamijou Touma, who was currently on the Star of Bethlehem, dared not imagine what was happening on the ground to cause such powerful tremors that could be felt even here.

"...it's still rising huh.."

Kamijou said, looking out the windows as he ran through the stone corridors. It was hard to grasp how high they were by looking at the empty sky, but by looking at the clouds and the distance they were from the Star of Bethlehem Touma saw that it was continuing to ascend into the night sky.

"My first response: The original Star of Bethlehem was a celestial body witnessed by a prophet. By observing it, the prophet predicted that the Son of God shall be born under its light."

"So this is an artificial star? Somehow this gives me a bad feeling. Let's just hope this thing doesn't fly into outer space, nor turn into a giant asteroid and usher in a new Ice Age..."

In front of him, the corridors groaned as they constantly shifted shape and form. However the changes did not have a feeling of random suddenness like an explosion. It was more of the feeling of a star settling and cooling down after

birth.

The total size of the structure was approximately 40 kilometers across. Touma guessed that they were towards the rear of the structure. The "ceremonial altar" that Sasha mentioned was at the very end of the right wing of the fortress. Since Fiamma's objective was there, he must be somewhere there in person. To stop the Archangel Misha Kreutzev, they had to head towards the "ceremonial altar", but the distance was too big for a high school boy to easily get across.

(Sasha escaped from the ceremonial grounds on the far right and made it all the way to me.)

Putting aside the possibility of Sasha having a superhuman movement speed, there must be some sort of high-speed transportation mechanism inside the Star of Bethlehem.

"My second response: From a human perspective, to have to go all the way back there after I purposely escaped from that place, I don't like the idea...."

"Then... Sasha, you could just stay here and wait."

"My third response: If it was possible this wouldn't be so hard..."

"You've got a point.... we have no way of getting out of here without a parachute. If I beat up Fiamma before I address this problem....."

Touma said, as he walked with Sasha towards the center of the fortress.

"This fortress is several tens of kilometers across, plus it is the enemy's territory. We'll just be wasting our strength if we aimlessly run around."

"My fourth response: I don't think I have enough stamina for that. As for transport, there's some here."

Finally, they found a transport train. Touma was not sure if it was really for transporting objects, as there was only one carriage. Even though it was a train, it seemed more like a car on rails. Obviously it was not a magical object.

Sasha got on and looked back at Touma.

"My first question: Are you not getting on?"

"No, I'm coming on..... Why would there be a train in this sort of place....?"

"My fifth response: I have difficulty answering that as well...."

Thinking back, in Fiamma's base, it looked as though work had been done on it, there were support shafts and the like everywhere. It probably was built with *combination* in mind.

".... Lessar said before, there are around 200 magicians in the Russian Orthodox Church... to guarantee the effective operation of the facilities, they had to preserve the existing jobs"

Touma got on the train. Although Sasha and Touma both had no idea how to operate the train, after they inputted their desired destination, the machine automatically went to work. It was just like operating an elevator.

The rail car lurched violently and began to move. Soon the roof above Touma and Sasha's heads disappeared and they were given a vista of the sky.

The sky was pitch black, an empty void without a single star.

"The Star of Bethlehem...."

Sasha whispered, staring up at the eerie scene.

"My first personal opinion: The star that heralded the coming of the Son of God. Fiamma of the Right is exposing it through artificial means, huh."

Even though the cloud cover below them was very thick, there were gaps everywhere, through which tiny pinpricks of light could be seen. Those were not nightlights, and Touma guessed they were gunfire or perhaps fires. He had seen a similar scene once on the television. A satellite was sending images of fires in the Amazon forest. Touma ground his teeth in anger.

Suddenly, one of the red glows near the surface started getting closer, and Touma could see vapor trails behind it. As the object got closer Touma could see it was a cylindrical shape.

"Surface-to-air missiles....??!!"

There wasn't just one or two. 50, no, 100 missiles flew through the air at them. It must have been a counterattack. A few of the missiles streaked towards Touma and Sasha. At this rate they would be receiving a direct hit. Even if the missile missed them, the track the car was running on would almost certainly be destroyed, perhaps even the rock underneath them, and Touma and Sasha would fall to their deaths. Even if they wanted to take evasive maneuvers now, it was impossible. Inside the narrow confines of the car carriage, there was nowhere to run.

BOOOM!

The windows of the carriage shattered, and a violent wind swept throughout the carriage. Even with his hands over his ears Touma felt stabbing pain in his eardrums. Then he noticed. This was not the effects of being hit by a missile. If they had been hit, the carriage would have been a smoldering wreck now, and there would have been no way for Touma and Sasha to survive.

Something had stopped the missiles.

Touma saw the culprit.

Inside the carriage, with temperatures dropping below freezing point, Touma stopped breathing. Their savior was none other than the archangel, Misha Kreutzev. The monster with giant wings of ice flew along the carriage at the same speed. Touma did not care anymore about those exploding missiles in the distance. Extreme fear had gripped his mind. The archangel continuously flapped its wings, intercepting the innumerable amount of state of the art missiles.

"....."

Inspecting her from close range, she was a remarkable creature indeed.

When looking at her from afar, Touma only thought of her as *A winged being with the outline of a human*. From close range, she resembled and yet did not resemble Sasha at the same time. Touma estimated her to be about two meters tall. Going by Kanzaki's description, Power of God resembled a female angel. However, her expressionless face reminded Touma of an unfinished mannequin.

That featureless face of hers with only depressions and rises in the cloth covering her entire body gave Touma an unnerving feeling just by looking at it. It wasn't to say that it didn't look feminine. Certainly it was more feminine than masculine.

It was hard to tell the skin and clothing apart. A smooth white fabric wrapped around the contours of her body. Everywhere across the cloth were fastened golden safety pins. The entire body was composed entirely only of two colors, white and gold. However because of the silvery white glow emitted from the angel's body, overall she looked more silverish in color.

Her hair was composed purely of the white fabric fanning out behind her head. There were lotus motifs on the top, and Touma guessed it had some religious significance. Bobbing above her head was a small halo composed of water. Touma did not know how or why, but it seemed the halo rotated faster or slower in accordance with the angel's behavior. Touma wondered what Sasha, a devout Christian, felt as she looked at the angel. Touma and the angel's "eyes" met. Her face was only a collection of indents, and there was nothing you could really call "eyeballs". However Touma felt a cold, uneasy feeling down his back as he stared at the depressions where her eyes should be.

Misha Kreutzev tilted her head slightly. Suddenly, the wings behind her back tensed, and Touma could tell that she was going to attack the train any time now.

"....this is bad....!?"

Fiamma of the Right had said Kamijou's right arm and Sasha's body were necessary for his plan. However, Misha Kreutzev may not know. She focused her gaze on Touma's right hand. The right hand that could banish any supernatural power.

To *her*, you could say that she was attracted to it because it was her greatest enemy.

Misha Kreutzev raised her wings.

SCREEAAAK!

An earsplitting sound of stone on stone. Or that was what Touma, who's heart was still in his throat, had thought. However that was not the case.

The noise was not that of Misha Kreutzev attacking Kamijou Touma. You could say it was the opposite. The noise was that of someone coming in from the side at horrific speeds, kicking Misha Kreutzev out of the way.

"M-my second question: What just happened?"

Sasha stuttered in fear and confusion. It was impossible for there to be an existence which could attack and harm an archangel. However, just as preposterous was that they were 5000 meters up in the air. It was impossible for most magicians to reach this high in the air.

However Kamijou Touma knew of one existence which could do both these things. Capable of defeating even Saints, and the only one capable of countering the magic of Misha Kreutzev. An existence created by science.

Created by the concentration of AIM diffusion fields. Emitting violet lightning, tens of wings emitting from her back.

"Kazakiri Hyouka....!"

Touma yelled into the ferocious winds whipping the air around the carriage.

"....that person, why is she here...?!"

Touma did not think she could hear. However, for an instant, her eyes looked at Touma, and Touma could see a faint expression on her face. Then she was dashing off towards Misha with a battle spirit that Touma had never seen before.

On the 30th of September, when Kazakiri became an angel for the first time, she had been controlled by someone else. However in the moment their eyes met just then, Touma felt something was different about her. Even though her hair was shining gold, a halo was around her head and purple wings of lightning sprouted from her back, Touma saw that she was "human".

She was unquestionably the Kazakiri Hyouka that Touma knew. To stop Misha's advances, the teenage girl placed herself between the archangel and the carriage. Ahead of them, Touma could see the next entrance into the interior of the Star of Bethlehem. But just as they were about to reenter the fortress. Touma could see that Misha had recovered from the blow, and was preparing to counterattack.

Kazakiri responded, and one of her feathers transformed into a bizarre sword of light. Touma did not know what happened next, for they were plunged into darkness as the carriage entered the tunnel. However the next instant a massive shockwave rent the air, and the carriage, along with its passengers, were blown into the air.

"Dammit!"

Even though he rushed to the back of the carriage, Touma still couldn't see what was going on outside.

"...What is going on?!....."

Huge explosions and pressure waves rocked them thrice more. It seemed they hadn't finished fighting yet. Touma did not know why that soft-spoken girl, formed by the concentration of AIM diffusion fields in Academy City, was there, or how she knew how to fight. There was just one thing to do. Not just for Index, but to protect her friends as well, Kamijou Touma had to bring down Misha Kreutzev as fast as possible.

Part 4

Kazakiri Hyouka.

For her, with those supernatural wings erupting from her back, this was actually her first time in the air. At first she doubted her wings could even allow her to fly. However it was not a problem now. She did not need to “learn” how to use her powers. It was as if those wings of hers, emitting purple lightning, gained the power of levitation just by her wishing it.

Protect my “friends”.

The Kazakiri who had come there with this intention, did not find “that girl”. However she found another “existence” similar to hers. An “existence” currently trying to kill Kazakiri’s former savior. 5000 meters up in the air, Kazakiri glared

at her enemy. That being similar to her.

The being at once so different to humans, yet resembled a member of the female gender. The being from which countless wings of ice sprouted, and a halo around her head. A being filled with unimaginable power, one which could easily wipe out humankind. Faced with her foe, Kazakiri thought these thoughts. Then another thought popped into her head.

Just like an angel.

Whether this thought was aimed at her opponent or at herself, Kazakiri did not know either. Perhaps all that could be used to describe the “existence” could be used to describe herself, and vice versa. Kazakiri slowly realized this. What was the opponent thinking? Had it thought of something? Had she found something deep within herself? The two creatures in the air finally began to move once again. In her hand, Kazakiri held a sword which contained the same power in it as her wings. Facing her, the unarmed angel raised its right hand, and grasped a blade of ice from midair. No signal was required. They moved in unison and met in a mighty collision.

BOOM!!!

An omni-directional blast wave expanded from the colliding angels. The air was almost like a solid wall, spreading out great distances. Even the gigantic floating fortress shook with the impact. A large number of its buildings were flattened, but the debris did not fall to earth. Rather, it floated in the air as if it was weightless, before being sucked back towards the superstructure of the fortress.

No time to pay heed to such minor details however.

The battle continued. As their swords clashed, the two monsters' wings flew towards each other, seemingly alive, and crashed together. At supersonic speeds, countless blades attacked both combatants from all sorts of angles. However, victory was not determined in that instant, for both of the monsters were attacking in similar fashion. Wings of ice shattered into millions of pieces, and wings of purple lightning blew apart into particles as they traded blows. The remnants of these broken wings dispersed rapidly from the pair, filling the air with shining particles of ice and lightning. The effect was rather like the shower of feathers left after a flock of birds take flight.

While striking out with countless wings, the Archangel of Water raised her blade of ice, lashing out at Kazakiri's head. Kazakiri parried the blow and prepared for a new assault. The face of her foe was expressionless. Like a puppet, its eyes, nose and mouth were not discernible from the rest of the face save for shallow depressions and bumps. It was almost as if the enemy was wearing a mask. The depression that Kazakiri guessed was a mouth twitched, and Kazakiri could hear a voice. It was not a voice speaking in any human language, and probably was inaudible to humans as a whole. She couldn't understand every word, but Kazakiri could get a general idea of what the opponent was saying.

"bhbo…return…hrobp"

The voice carried a tone of emotion. If she could feel the emotion, then she could somewhat decipher the otherworldly language.

"Revert. frPlace. Correct. Alignment. ujj. Heaven. Original. Position."

It was a bit garbled. The outline of the body of the angel of ice shuddered slightly. Because she too did not have a body of flesh and blood, Kazakiri was able to see the composition of the shell of the other angel.

“…Opposing powers…forcibly put in one container?”

Kazakiri could see fire. Fire that was as incompatible with water as oil. Two different powers were contained inside the angel. At this rate, the angel which could be considered somewhat beautiful, would not be able to maintain her physical form. A container could not contain two powers at once. At first glance it would seem that Kazakiri, who was formed from the AIM diffusion fields of various espers with different powers, was being hypocritical. However when it came down to it, the AIM diffusion fields that maintain Kazakiri’s existence were much more similar in comparison to the two contained in the angel of ice. The speaking angel emitted an aura of anger.

“Return. Must. Plan. Go. Right. Use. Advantage. Contact. Plan. Help.”

“….. Even if it's for this that you are willing to harm my friends, I will stop you with all my power!”

“Harm. Ignore. Priority. Return. Correct. Position. Must. Obstruct. Evil. Intention. Judge. All.”

A massive surge of power radiated from the angel of ice. With even greater force, the blade of ice swung down once again, colliding with the sword of Kazakiri, and both angels were forced back from the impact. Misha waved the sword over her head. At this time. Misha suddenly turned her head from Kazakiri, her attention elsewhere.

“Capture.”

She spoke. The archangel who was oblivious to all but her goals spoke.

“Necessary. Report. Lamb-skin. Found.”

Part 5

Holding Last Order in his arms, Accelerator sat down in the truck parked in the

snow. He rode shotgun, as Misaka Worst jumped into the driver seat.

“Where to?”

“Sneaking around would just be a waste of time. If we want to get this over with as fast as possible, we should head straight for the middle of the fighting.”

“I understand~” Misaka Worst said, inserting the car key that she had obtained from Elizalina. It seemed the car was an automatic, as Misaka Worst was easily able to control it with one hand. In the unnatural pitch black of the night, the headlights of the car sliced a path of light through the shroud of darkness. In no time they had already left the little town behind, and were on the open tundra.

“It should take us roughly… 5 minutes before we cross the border…. Now that I think about it, for us to charge recklessly into the battlefront which was even visible from back there…even with science on our side there is a limit to how much we can do.”

Hanging in the middle of the night sky was the giant fortress. It was just far too big. Like a cloud, it covered the whole sky, stretching from one corner of the sky to the other. Even more spectacular, at the back of the flying fortress, a supernatural glow was emitting from the battle between the two angels. As their wings clashed, the shockwaves spread throughout the sky, and could be felt even from this distance. The residue from their battle painted the black sky with unnatural colors of blue and purple.

“Eh?!”

As if he was going down into an ocean trench, Accelerator felt a tremendous pressure on his chest. There was definitely something wrong with the color of the night sky. As his chest was weighed down by this pressure, Accelerator turned towards Misaka Worst.

“Hey… you sure you really don’t know what the heck that thing is? As it is formed from the Misaka Network, you should be able to glean some information about it…”

“Which angel are you talking about? The one with wings of ice? Or the one with wings of lightning?”

“…. Either one is fine, even if its information from Academy City, I doubt the information is restricted to only the confines of science…”

….. If he put it that way, it seemed Last Order was heavily involved with those beings flying in the air. Accelerator would not rest until he had saved Last Order. It seemed that the reason for Last Order’s current deteriorating health was due to the angels’ existence. In which case, to save Last Order, Accelerator just had to go up to the fortress and destroy the angels.

But how?

Aiwass’s power was overwhelming. Even in “Dark Wing” mode, at his current level, Accelerator was not able to even make a move before he was crushed. Even though he was called a “villain” he could not even save one little girl.

Then… what could he do? How would he shelter her, and protect her smile from this cruel, barbaric world? The lamb-skin parchment tucked away in his coat was emitting a hateful aura. The arcane symbols scrawled upon it, were they of the same caliber as the “Angel” created on the 30th of September, or was it even more potent? If Accelerator could not analyze the situation, then he would just have to ignore safety procedures prior to combat and charge in with no knowledge of the enemy’s abilities.

This would be a huge gamble.

In the past, such a move that would have threatened Last Order’s life would be a definite no-go for Accelerator. But now, this route was the only way to save Last Order’s life. It was like walking in pitch blackness on a narrow path, where both sides of the pathway led only to bottomless pits, with no idea where you were going.

At this time.

The two monsters battling in the air suddenly sped downwards towards the ground in a spiral of death. If a religious man had seen this scene, it would have undoubtedly been worthy of becoming a legend to be told for countless generations to come. However, Accelerator was not moved to tears by such a scene. For however he looked at them, it seemed the two angels were catapulting straight for the car he was in. To be more precise, one of the angels was flying at him, and the other was in hot pursuit.

“…could it be, they are attracted to this parchment?”

As this realization dawned on him, a malicious grin broke across Accelerator’s face. It seemed that the Russian Orthodox Church, which had started all this ruckus, needed the lamb-skin procedure to complete whatever infernal plans they had. That was what Elizalina had said. Misaka Worst, who was clenching on to the steering wheel, was not as calm.

“Hey! What should we do, what should we do? This situation is worse than running into a Category 5 hurricane!”

“The difference between a natural disaster and a man-made disaster is simple.”

Accelerator rolled down the window, ignoring the freezing winds which could cut like knives.

“Who cares if there are enemies to be slain. We are very lucky that the targets are right in front of us. Saves us the trouble of going to them.”

As he spoke, Accelerator leaned his upper body out the window

“I’ll leave Last Order to you. Try to avoid being killed before I finish this.”

“My, my, this is really troublesome, to be entrusted with a task by others.. Misaka hates this type of situation the most.”

“People who are worthy to be used like this are lucky. They get to crack boring jokes, and have a chance of not being killed.”

“Hmph, Misaka does indeed like that part.”

There was no time left to waste on idle gossip. The two monsters were almost upon them. Accelerator switched on the electrode in his neck. Controlling the vectors of the wind, Accelerator formed four tornados from his back, like wings, and leapt out the window. He didn’t touch the ground. Rather, he rocketed up into the air towards the two battling monsters. A third monster had entered the fray.

Part 6

Darkness spread out ignoring the time of day as it were a solar eclipse. And on top of that, a great number of unnatural points of light glittered in the sky ignoring the constellations as if it were a poorly made planetarium. However, very few people were glad to see that scene that could be described as ominous or mystical. Even then, various explosions and vibrations resounded.

Amid all that, Glickin walked through a snowy forest.

He was the Russian soldier who had operated the anti-aircraft gun along with Hamazura and Digurv in order to protect the village from the privateer attack.

As Academy City forces had occupied the area, the danger of more attacks from the Russians had lessened. They had constructed temporary buildings so the villagers were not going to freeze to death in the blizzard because their mostly wooden houses had been destroyed.

"…"

But Glickin could not partake in that blessing.

He was a former member of the Russian army and the air force base he had been stationed at had been attacked by Academy City. The equipment and methods used in that attack had been completely different, so he felt the people sending aid to the villagers and the ruthless killers were different people and units. One side was official and the other side was unofficial. However, he still could not forgive them.

It was not anger that ruled his heart.

It was all rooted in fear.

(There's no place for me here in Russia now that I've fought against the privateers. Maybe it would be best if I headed to the Elizalina Alliance as quickly as I can.)

Despite thinking that, Glickin was not walking through that snowy forest in order to leave the village. Even if he were to head to the Elizalina Alliance, it didn't feel right to him to do so without saying farewell to the villagers who saved him.

So why was Glickin wandering around in that place?

(How far did that kid go…?)

There was a lost child.

There were children in the village and kids tended to go off to play after extreme tension like that of the privateer attack was over. Having the danger gone may have raised their spirits unnecessarily high. Even the adults were in a mood similar to after a round of drinking.

But then a girl of about 10 had disappeared.

The other children playing with her hadn't seen where she went. They just said she was suddenly gone.

The unnatural night sky put adults like Glickin on guard (even if they knew being on guard would not do any good). However, the missing girl was still a child. She was still at the age where she believed in Santa Claus. It was possible she wandered off while watching that night sky that she felt had some kind of hope in it.

However, the Russian winter was harsh. There was the cold of course, but she could also easily run into a carnivore that was woken up from its hibernation by the bombings and bombardments. And on top of all that, Glickin had heard that landmines were spread around the area. It was not an environment where a child could safely play.

It seemed the girl's mother had tried to help in the search, but everyone had stopped her. The child's life was important, but having the cold or the landmines take two victims would be even worse. As such, Glickin and a few others had looked around the village.

There weren't very many of them, so Glickin was the only one there.

He had walked about 3 kilometers from the village, but he had still seen no sign of the girl. He started to wonder if a small child could walk that far through snow piled that deep. A child could likely do it if she was dead set on doing so, but if she were just heading out to play, her motivation would normally wane after coming that far and she would head back to the village.

Perhaps he should head back.

Just when Glickin started to think that, he saw a figure moving beyond the blizzard of snow.

But it was large.

“!?”

He immediately hid behind a tree thinking he had spotted a bear or something. However, that was not what it was. A wild bear would not be wearing a white combat uniform meant to be used in intense cold. From the design, Glickin could tell it was a Russian army uniform, but he had never worn anything that high class.

(…An unofficial special unit!? Is that the unit called Eastern Death!?)

That unit mainly used sniping and explosives to assassinate important people from other countries and start wars between countries that were inconvenient to Russia. During the cold war, there had been an urban legend that merely writing that name on paper was enough for the unit to come assassinate you.

Even in the middle of a war, they were not a group one would run into for no reason. By the time they were wearing those uniforms and walking around, a tragedy was sure to follow.

Why were they there?

And why had they gotten out of their vehicle and begun to walk on foot.

Glickin thought of Digurv and the others’ village that had been targeted in order to create a front line base and the Academy City forces that had set up there.

Glickin had been stationed inside an air force base, so he had no chance of

winning in a fight against an elite unit. He could only see one there, but there should be at least a few of them there if they were carrying out some kind of military operation.

He needed to get away from there as quickly as possible and return to the village.

He didn't like to rely on them, but the Academy City forces could do something about that special unit. They were not a force that used great military power. Instead, they were experts at using a few people in secret to throw the enemy forces into chaos. If their location and the timing of their attack were known, they could be forced back.

Glickin took a step away from the tree he was hiding behind.

But he was not able to take a second step.

The figure on the other side of the blizzard suddenly froze. Glickin knew he was in trouble. He felt a great pressure. It was a gaze. Because there were no other people around, that piercing gaze accurately found Glickin.

"…"

Despite the fair distance between them, each of them read the silence of the other.

Immediately afterwards, the man from the special unit put the stock of his assault rifle to his shoulder and mercilessly aimed the barrel toward Glickin.

"Shit!!"

Glickin forced down the fear squeezing at his heart and turned around. Rifle bullets struck the trunk of the tree he had been hiding behind before and tree bark flew off lightly scraping Glickin's cheek. He had been lucky to not be directly hit, but he had no time to reflect on that good fortune. Glickin merely ran through the snowy forest.

He did not think he had any way of winning.

He would not be saved just by escaping from the single soldier following him

from behind.

(He’s likely contacted someone on his radio.)

Glickin thought as he frantically moved his legs that were about to cramp up in fear.

(I don’t know how many of them there are, but I can’t escape if I’m surrounded!!)

The snow at Glickin’s feet was blown away by rifle bullets. He continued running while almost falling over until he finally tripped up over his own feet and fell on top of the snow. He had no time to stand back up. Even then, the enemy was approaching from behind. The closer that enemy got, the more Glickin’s odds of death shot up. He tried to force his snow-covered body up, but another obstacle was now in his way.

It was not the enemy.

It was the girl who he had gone out to look for.

She must have come that way upon hearing the loud noises in the snowy forest. It was the worst possible turn of events for Glickin. He had almost no chance of getting away on his own and having to take the child with him would drag that down to zero chance.

However, he still couldn’t leave the child behind.

The man from the special unit had fired without checking who he was. He was eliminating all witnesses. It would not matter if that witness were a civilian or a child.

“Dammit!!”

Glickin picked up the child and continued to run, but his feet sank deeper into the snow than he had expected due to the weight of the child. He lost his balance and fell onto the snow once more.

The special unit soldier approached.

From that range, Glickin could clearly see the man's finger moving on the trigger of the assault rifle.

A gunshot resounded throughout the snowy forest.

Glickin clenched his eyes shut, but he felt no pain. When he cautiously reopened his eyes, he saw the special unit soldier collapsed on the ground. A mass of snow weighing close to 10 kilograms had suddenly fallen down on top of him from a tree branch.

Of course, that had not been some stupid natural phenomenon.

The gunshot had not been from the assault rifle in the soldier's hand. A third party had fired from somewhere at the tree branch near the soldier. Firing at that large stationary target was much easier than firing at the small moving target of the soldier.

"Are you okay!?" a voice yelled out.

It was speaking in Japanese which was rare in those parts. The gunshots continued. The snow on the ground near the special unit soldier scattered as he tried to get up. The tough soldier could be seen raising his hands to surrender.

"Glickin, tie him up!! That only worked as a surprise attack. I can't deal with someone like that in a serious firefight!!"

Glickin recognized the voice. He looked over in the direction it was coming from and saw Hamazura Shiage running over from between the trees. He held a handgun in his hand. He seemed irritated that Glickin wasn't moving and he went over and bound the special unit soldier's hands with wire himself.

"…Why…?" Glickin muttered in shock, but then he remembered the situation.

He let go of the girl he had been holding.

"No, it doesn't matter. Anyway, we need to get out of here. That man you just tied up is a member of a Russian special unit. Those gunshots and his lack of response over the radio will bring his comrades here. We need to get out of here before we're surrounded."

“I have business with them.”

“?”

Glickin frowned and a girl approached from behind Hamazura. Glickin thought he remembered that her name was Takitsubo. She had been very ill before, but now she seemed better.

Hamazura looked over toward Takitsubo and she took the little girl’s hand. Takitsubo then took her away naturally. It was as if Hamazura was about to mention something he didn’t want the girl to hear.

“It’s the Kremlin Report.”

“What?”

“There is an old abandoned nuclear missile silo near the village. The leaders of the Russian army are thinking that Academy City may be trying to take that facility, so they are going to disseminate a bacteriological weapon in the area. A manual for this type of situation already existed beforehand.”

“…God dammit,” Glickin said in almost a groan.

Normally, he would not have immediately believed something like that, but the unofficial special unit that had tried to kill him was an ominous sign.

“So that special unit has brought in some terrible virus!? We might not be able to make it in time even if we have the people in the village evacuate now!!”

“No. Takitsubo read the report in Russian, but it seems the dissemination of the bacteriological weapon has to be done in stages. The report on the expected damages had data on the wind direction, the temperature, and the humidity. It seems the humidity, the amount of moisture in the air, is very important for it to spread and there’s a good chance it will turn to diamond dust in this cold.”

“Then…”

“But if they regulate the temperature and humidity using a large amount of steam, it will spread almost explosively. That’s why they intend to disseminate particles of highly preservative gel upwind of their target. The gel is made so it

does not freeze even in this cold. With the temperature and humidity in the corresponding area regulated at the optimum level, the bacteriological weapon is released. Once it enters someone's body, the virus is preserved by the infected person's body temperature and moisture."

"So if we can stop the dissemination of the preservative gel in the first stage, we might be able to do something about it…"

"The report mentioned a steam dispenser. It's the device they're using to send the particles of gel in to the air. I think it's something like a special humidifier. Anyway, we need to somehow destroy that device before the—you called them a special unit?—before they can carry out that part of the plan."

Somehow.

It was easy enough to say, but that meant fighting and defeating that special unit. If their enemy was moving in a group, they couldn't just carry out a surprise attack with just the two of them.

"…What do we do? Should we call in the Academy City forces in the village?"

"We don't have time. And if they detect any major movements, the special unit may expedite the dissemination schedule. The general location of the steam dispenser can be calculated from the terrain and weather data plus the direction of the wind, but I don't actually know the precise location. If that unit is already taking action, we might not make it in time even now. And…"

Hamazura trailed off.

Glickin slightly turned his head in response to that silence.

"Sorry…"

"It's fine. But we should take action before the remaining soldiers become suspicious. Glickin, can you drive? Take this key. There's a four wheel drive car hidden 300 meters west of here. Take that girl and head back to the village."

"But then you'll…!!"

"Part of that unit might be wandering around, so we can't just leave that kid

here. Having her walk back is dangerous too and taking her to the battlefield is out of the question. You need to escort her. Take that tied up soldier, too."

Hamazura then pulled out his cell phone.

"Let's exchange phone numbers. There's nothing around here, but there's a signal here due to the relay antennas. I'll contact you once I find the steam dispenser. At that point, I can still stop the dissemination even if they notice Academy City taking action, so you need to do everything you can to convince the Academy City soldiers to transport everyone in that village. Do the same if I don't contact you within half an hour. Pay attention to the direction of the wind. It may not be much of a consolation once the bacteriological weapon has been disseminated, but it's better than moving without taking anything into account. I would rather have everyone flee right away, but it would be pointless if they all fled in the direction of the steam dispenser. Do you understand?"

"…"

"Do you understand, Glickin!? If something happens to me and you do nothing, everyone in the village could be infected!!"

"…"

"I doubt everyone in the Russian army wants to use this bacteriological weapon! That's why they sent in a unit that carries out heartless missions for the first dissemination!! If this gets the proper results, the other soldiers will be less reluctant to carry out their missions and this same thing will start happening all across Russia!! We have to keep that from happening. I don't want the Academy City soldiers, the villagers, or anyone else to be sacrificed. So do you understand, Glickin!?"

"Yes, I understand!! God dammit, I'll protect those villagers no matter what it takes. So you better not die!!"

Hamazura and Glickin exchanged cell phone numbers and lightly tapped their palms together as if hitting the plastic phones together. They said nothing more. Takitsubo concluded that the discussion was over, so she came back with the little girl. Glickin grabbed the girl's hand and carried the bound soldier over his shoulder as he headed in the direction of the hidden car.

Hamazura put his cell phone in his pocket and spoke to Takitsubo.

“Let’s go.”

“Hamazura. From the weather and terrain data in the report, the area about 500 meters north of here seems most suspicious,” Takitsubo said smoothly perhaps because she had been in charge of reconnaissance in Item.

It had nothing to do with her power, but she had polished her skills for getting a direction from the available data.

“There is a small mountain of less than 100 meters there. The wind blowing from there heads toward the nuclear silo and the village.”

“It won’t be on the summit. They want to get this over with as quickly as possible, so they’ll have quickly set up the steam dispenser as close to the base of the mountain as they could get away with.”

Hamazura walked over to the place where the soldier had lay collapsed just a bit before and picked up his assault rifle and magazines. It had a completely different weight and overall feel than the handgun. He doubted he could use it properly, but a handgun didn’t feel very reliable.

Hamazura’s movement stopped for an instant at the chill of the murderous weapon.

But he then moved his gaze up as if shaking his eyes free of the weapon, hung the rifle from its shoulder strap, and headed for the northern mountain.

“Hamazura. Let’s finish this quickly. I’ve had enough of this war.”

“Yeah, and I don’t like this eclipse. Why couldn’t it be a nice aurora or something?”

Part 7

Accelerator was like a blast wave from an explosion, blowing away the snow from the ground, he charged towards the two angels. In the moment before their weapons were about to clash, Accelerator considered which entity he should get rid of first. However he came to the conclusion that since both of them were winged monsters, there was no point in aiding either side, and he leapt between the two, using his Reflection ability to attack the angels by redirecting their own blows at themselves.

BOOM!! The sound of explosions rang throughout the air. Against the doll-like angel of ice, Reflection was largely ineffective. Even though he used Reflection, the wings of ice were like soft candy, as they were bent out of shape, they were sent flying towards the forests, sending up ice and dirt as they went along.

The angle of reflection was too small. If Accelerator continued to forcibly reflect the attacks, his body would be injured too. However, Accelerator's expression did not change, for the wings of the glasses-wearing angel were fully deflected by his Reflection. The angel had an almost human-like expression of surprise, and in this instant Accelerator took away the vectors from the angel's attack. Gathering the vectors, Accelerator launched a merciless strike straight at the chest of the glasses-wearing angel.

The sound vanished.

The seemingly weightless flying angel was knocked back 300 meters. Like a crashing airplane, the monster rolled spectacularly across the ground, knocking away everything in her path. The reason Accelerator attacked her first was very simple. His powers worked on this angel, not so much on the other angel. Logically he should try to take out the more difficult opponent first. For this, he would have to incapacitate the easier opponent first to fully concentrate on the harder one.

"You?!"

The glasses wearing angel, using powers that Accelerator could understand, spoke.

She spoke in Japanese, without the distortions Aiwass had.

"You controlled the wings formed by congregated AIM diffusion fields?"

“Hmph, I’m surprised a monster like you has the capacity to think and ask questions.”

Accelerator unzipped his jacket, and took out the lamb-skin parchment, waving it at the AIM angel.

“You were attracted here by this thing right?”

“……”

The science angel frowned in puzzlement. At that moment, the air around them became full with killing intent. This supernatural killing intent was emitting from the angel of ice, whose wings had been shattered by Accelerator’s Reflection. The snow around her for 500 meters vanished, melted to reform those majestic wings of ice. With an ear-splitting sound, the mass of water shot up towards the body of the angel. In an instant, those wings became weapons of destruction.

“Oi, you annoying creature, wanna introduce yourself?”

Accelerator zipped up his jacket, and turned to face the archangel, as if he was on the side of the AIM angel.

“Um…”

“You stand behind.” Accelerator commanded in a bored tone. “I have no interest in a creation of Academy City. To save that brat I have to deal with that thing over there.”

From the earlier clash Accelerator had analyzed his opponents. Although both angels were monsters, they were not on the same level as Aiwass. Reflection and vector control worked perfectly upon the angel of science. As for the angel who had unknown origins, from the way it was being knocked around by the AIM angel, it was also a far cry from Aiwass in terms of power. For, Accelerator could not even begin to think of a way to defeat Aiwass.

(Hmph, I’ve won.)

Though this was a slightly ridiculous way of judging the situation, Accelerator was confident in his victory. However at that instant.

“….hubjsaioklwnwtplwmbgfaomgffASIKSWWTQPNGpiuanbgkllwqqjdl….”

The archangel began a chant. Something was leaking out. Not only was the chant in a soft thin voice, hard to hear, but it was impossible to discern what language the archangel was chanting in.

“….serghATTACKhyAREAhgoinDETERMINED….”

Accelerator’s ears started to hurt. He felt like he was stuck in a spinning kaleidoscope.

“INCANTATIONgreCASTING…..COMPLETEfrh.”

(I know. I know this language), Accelerator thought. As he raised his head to look at the archangel, all her wings were spread out across the unnatural night sky. Like a radio tower, it seemed as though she was broadcasting signals of some kind into the sky.

And then, Misha’s voice was loud and clear.

“Command, Sweep-Cast initialized.”

The night sky was filled with flashing lights.

There was no time to be amazed at the spectacle, however.

Within a radius of 2 kilometers, tens of millions of fiery meteors of destruction rained down.

This was a perfect "Heaven's Judgment", one that Accelerator's vector control could not hope to emulate.

"Wha-what?!"

Accelerator was unable to respond. To dodge or to try and take the attack head on? Before Accelerator could fully consider his options, the maelstrom of destruction was already upon him. Accelerator could no longer tell the sky from the ground. In the moment that he was hit by the attack, his body was flung ferociously around like a rag doll. Although Accelerator was able to lessen the damage with his vector control, he still tasted blood.

Snow, dirt and sand were all tossed up by the attack, filling Accelerator's vision with a blur of white.

"This..... this is....?!"

As Accelerator was hurled towards the ground, he gasped for breath, but no sound came out. His throat was blocked. Using vector control, Accelerator cleared the congealed blood from his throat, and was finally able to breathe.

(Fuck.....!! What the fuck was that?!)

The massive amounts of snow and dirt tossed up by the attack filled the entire sky.

In this panorama of white, there was only one other color.

A glow of blue, radiating from the archangel of destruction.

"....."

Once again, the sky started flashing, and Accelerator was filled with foreboding. For the onslaught he had been through was just the initial "shot" of the attack.

The archangel relentlessly pounded Accelerator with the fiery rain for another ten "shots".

("You're fucking kidding me....")

His body hurting all over, Accelerator struggled to stand up. He could not die here.

He still had something to do. He would fight until he died or the monster was crushed.

("It doesn't matter if I have to destroy it. Just a reason to defeat it will be enough for me!")

BOOM!! Once more, the sound of explosions filled the air. Controlling the vectors at his feet, Accelerator sped towards the monster who was surrounded by a blue aura.

Once again, the archangel's emotionless voice rang out.

"SECONDkoWAVE. ATTACKwagerPREPARATIONwsINITIALIZING. 30 SECONDS UNTIL SECOND WAVE OF SWEEP."

At the same time.

BOOM!! Giant explosions rent the air above Russia. It was the first shot of Sweep.

"......she went overboard."

Fiamma muttered to himself, 7000 meters above the land in the flying fortress Star of Bethlehem. He could feel the explosions from here.

He was slightly annoyed that Misha had dragged the Star of Bethlehem into the line of fire. The spell formation of Sweep was formed higher up than the Star of Bethlehem. Thus, even if the Power of God cast a restricted Sweep, it would destroy part of the flying fortress. Judging by the color of the sky, the second wave of Sweep would start in 30 seconds. The damage done to the Star of Bethlehem would be even greater. However, Fiamma wasn't too concerned.

However Fiamma of the Right's expression did not change. It was almost as if he wanted to pull a face but couldn't do it. Besides, the Star of Bethlehem had a certain level of self-regeneration. The debris of the segments hit by the Sweep would float around in space for a while before returning to the fortress.

Fiamma of the Right used the Power of God to augment his 5 senses.

"So it's like this, huh..."

He spoke in a bored voice.

"So this is my enemy. Would the outcome of the battle change because of the appearance of the archangel? Don't say you won't imitate me."

Although his interest was piqued by the appearance of the angel created by Academy City, its appearance did not change anything. As for the person fighting alongside the science angel, it seemed he was one of the top ability users of the science side. Even if he joined in the fight, they would not be able to defeat Misha Kreutzev.

The power of Sweep was enormous. At this rate, even the monsters of science

were going to start crying for mercy soon. It was certain that with the casting of the second and third waves of Sweep, the monsters would be annihilated. For they could not dodge, nor defend against Sweep.

There was no need to end the conflict with one single strike. Just wearing them down slowly and then annihilating them was enough. That was the brutality in which the Roman Catholic Church was well versed.

Just as waves wore down even the toughest of rocks, Misha would relentlessly grind the enemy into the ground.

"If the enemy is only at this level,"

Fiamma stroked his staff with his fingers.

"Then no one will be able to stop me..."

In his hand, the remote used to control Index had now become an artifact for him to control the great archangel.

"Oh, my Sweep is going to destroy this world huh?"

Fiamma heard the "voice" in his mind. He recognized the "voice".

"...long time no see. Acqua of the Back, do you still desire a position within God's Right Seat? Or have you reverted to your mercenary ways?"

"Anything is fine, as long as it's to stop you."

"Hmph, and how will you do that?"

Twirling his staff, Fiamma spoke with an air of contempt.

"In this situation that I have created, placing the 6 billion people of the world at the mercy of the ravages of war, how will you be able to save them?"

"..."

"You are a symbol of war. Using violence to bring peace. Fighting unknown dangers in conflicts around the world. Spreading the use of force throughout the world. A person like you is the best type of chess piece. Come on, everyone

eagerly waits to hear how you shall use violence to solve the problem."

Chess pieces that had served their purpose were no longer needed.

"Why has this conflict started? It's not like you don't know that I started it. However, I did not fire a shot. It's because that I have judged and made a decision, that I ask you how you are going to save everyone."

"So, this is the reason for the archangel swinging an iron fist down on the populace?"

"You want to stop me? In the end, you still resort to force. Your side has no more tricks up their sleeve, how will you stop me? The outcome is already decided on the Academy City's side who is reinforced by the angel. You, who entered that place on the 30th of September to rescue Vento should know that."

Fiamma laughed.

"The existence of the science angel warps the fabric of this world, and has huge negative influences on magic. Vento being dragged into conflict with it is proof. That thing will not fight by your side. If you try to use force, both sides will just engage in combat till the death."

"..."

"Besides, Misha Kreutzev surpasses you all. Even if she is not perfect, she is still the real thing, a Christian archangel. In a full on war, the only victor is me."

This was the reasoning Fiamma had come to.

"You are strong, but you are just a pawn in this game. Now, no matter how much force you try to use, you cannot stop Misha. I give you leave to try, but it is better for you to just stay on the sidelines and watch."

"Oh?"

Acqua laughed, and Fiamma lost his smirk.

"Then I shall show you a way to stop her without force."

In an instant, Misha Kreutzev's power was cut by a third.

The form of an angel was basically a mass of energy, they had no physical body. More accurately, their bodies were not composed of physical matter. Fiamma, who was linked to Misha, was suddenly dealt a blow through his 5 senses.

"You!..What did you do....No! This is...?!"

"Have you forgotten? I am Acqua of the Back. A member of the most secretive Roman Catholic organization, God's Right Seat. I hold the position of the back, and am associated with the colour 'Blue' and the moon. I also wield the power of one of the four Archangels, Power of God."

"You!....Did you, in your own body....?!!"

"For Christians, releasing and sealing "Telesma" is a basic among basics. Also, my body is the strongest "link" to the Power of God, being "Acqua of the Back" of God's Right Seat. Therefore, if I forcefully took out the water affinity Telesma within myself, I would not want to think of what would happen to the Power of God from whom such power stems."

"...."

It was impossible to imagine that such a plan could have been thought up by a sane man. To forcefully contain the power of an archangel within a mortal body was pure foolishness, even for magicians; for the human body would certainly explode from trying to contain such power.

However...

"It is not 'impossible'."

Acqua's voice shattered the silence.

"Right now, the Russian nun you are using, she is doing a similar thing to what I am proposing."

"You are insane! Sasha is only able to perform such acts because of the Telesma remaining in her body from the events of Angel Fall! Besides, to forcefully suppress Misha Kreutzev requires you to take in far more Telesma!! You don't

have that sort of ability."

"Hmph, don't talk like that.... What others can do, I can do too."

So it has come to this, Fiamma thought. He should have known. As a member of God's Right Seat, it was stupid for Fiamma to have tried to apply normal reasoning to Acqua.

"Then.... show me!"

Fiamma shouted out the challenge.

"That I shall."

"You know right? This stupid plan of yours will destroy your combat ability. You are just destroying yourself by trying this."

In the frozen tundra of Russia, there stood a man. He was far away from the border between Russia and Elizalina, and a distance away from the flying fortress. It was a perfect location to perform his spell.

The man thrust his sword which was larger than his body into the ground to support the weight of his own massive frame. Around him, the air warped, and condensed into the same consistency as treacle. This air flowed in a spiral towards the man.

A tremendous amount of energy flowed towards him. Under the dark blue sky and the shining full moon, Acqua absorbed the Power of God.

"UUUUWWWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAA????!!!!!"

Power flowed into him from every pore on his body. This amount of energy could not be tolerated by a human's body. Just like how a fan could only suck in a predetermined amount of air. If you forcefully tried to take in more than your limit, the consequences would be dire.

Blood started pouring out from his legs and chest. It felt as though the muscles on his back and neck were on fire. Blood vessels throughout his body were bursting, and his nervous system was going into overload. The man could feel

the tendons and ligaments throughout his body snapping one by one. His legs were shaking, as his once powerful body was on the brink of collapse.

However, he did not fall. The sword stuck in the ground, and the willpower in his chest. By relying on those two things, the man was determined to stay standing.

The destruction was not limited to just his physical body. His magical power was slowly burned out of him. The man was a Saint, and a member of God's Right Seat. Those two traits of his gave him tremendous power, surpassing that of other magicians. However, now the source of his body was being torn apart and he was losing his magical prowess. His body screamed at him to stop this madness, but a man will not stop until he achieves his goal.

Only by absorbing the Telesma of Misha Kreutzev in his body, could he weaken the enemy. To lessen the chance of the Telesma meant to save people being used to take human lives. That was all he wanted. As long as he could ensure that, the man would be able to clench his teeth and battle with the overwhelming tide of Telesma.

And then....

BOOM!!!

Accelerator's attack hit Misha Kreutzev dead on.

Because of this interruption, the spell formation of Sweep collapsed.

Accelerator and the angel of science charged towards Misha Kreutzev.

To destroy it.

To prevent the battlefield from turning into a wasteland.

And then...

Fiamma of the right smiled. The amount of Telesma Acqua of the Back had absorbed was only about 50% of that of the Power of God. As he had foreseen, it

was not enough to stop Misha Kreutzev.

"Even 50% is enough to attain victory."

Fiamma sighed in a bored voice.

"Saint, God's Right Seat, both are gone. This is over now. You gave your life in vain."

"KILL!" He commanded.

It was over. Misha Kreutzev would destroy the angel of science and the ability user from Academy City, and proceed to exterminate the remaining forces of Academy city. No one would be able to stop Fiamma's plans, as long as Misha was there, the Star of Bethlehem would not fall, even if 50,000 nuclear warheads were launched simultaneously at it.

That was what should have happened.

But, nothing happened. Misha Kreutzev, who had received the order to "Kill", was not moving.

It was an unpleasant feeling.

His superiority had been perfect, but a slight tilt had formed. It was an extremely small tilt, but it gave him an uneasy feeling he could not ignore. It was as if that small tilt would cause everything to slide away.

"That bastard...."

Fiamma of the Right noticed. There was one more person, currently not on the battlefield, an existence who wielded the supreme power.

"THAT BASTAAAARRRDD!!!!!"

Part 8

At the same time.

Kamijou Touma was at the very furthest corner on the right of the Star of Bethlehem, at the ceremonial altar where Sasha had been used as a medium to summon Misha Kreutzev.

Apparently Fiamma had fixed Index's remote to the end of his staff, allowing him to control Misha. Therefore, to stop Misha's rampage of destruction, he had to destroy the staff, and in order to destroy the staff, he would have to confront Fiamma in a battle.

However, there was more. Touma searched for a quicker and more certain way to stop Misha.

"....Misha Kreutzev appeared after the Star of Bethlehem."

Touma said aloud. It wasn't certain if he was explaining his thoughts to Sasha, or just speaking out loud to himself.

"If he was able to summon the power of an archangel, why didn't he summon it earlier? Even if he did not start the third world war and turn his potential enemies on each other, with the power of an archangel behind him, he would probably still have been able to defeat us all at once. Then, why didn't Fiamma summon Misha until after the Star of Bethlehem appeared?"

This could only mean one thing. Touma finally came to this conclusion.

"The Star of Bethlehem is needed to summon the Archangel Misha Kreutzev and anchor her to this plane! That is why Fiamma only summoned it after the fortress flew into the sky; not because he didn't feel like it, but because he COULDN'T summon it beforehand even if he wanted to!"

"If that was true, things become much simpler. On the Star of Bethlehem, there must be an object that anchors Misha's existence to this plane. I'll just have to use my right hand to destroy this 'object'--!!"

Touma grabbed one of the thin poles surrounding the ceremonial grounds. About 3 centimeters in diameter, there were several tens of these poles, some of which contained a black liquid, others containing a white liquid. Just as Sasha said, the white and black poles were paired together around the entrance of the

ceremonial grounds, almost as if they were drawing in mysterious 'energy' into the grounds from outside.

Since there was so many of them, Touma guessed that those poles must be involved in a complex process maintaining the existence of Misha.

Then, all he had to do was break the poles.

CRACK!

The transparent containers were smashed. White and black liquid splashed onto the ground, forming marble-like shapes. It felt as if something started to tremble. Although Touma could not see it, he could feel that an existence was trembling to its core.

At that time.

Acqua of the Back had taken away half of Misha's power.

Kamijou Touma had broken the pillars anchoring her existence to this plane.

And now, Misha Kreutzev was on the receiving end of the ferocious attacks of Academy City's strongest esper and the angel of science....

The archangel's cry echoed throughout the Russian night.

It was a sound the brain of a human could not comprehend, but one could tell it was different from a simple scream. The cry contained unfathomable emotions. Misha's body, already straining to maintain a humanoid shape, simply collapsed, returning to a state of pure energy. An immense amount of energy. A bomb.

Accelerator, who was the closest to Misha at the time, ignored the rapidly diminishing power of his electrode, and flew towards the archangel at full power.

"...who gives a shit what just happened, this isn't the problem at the moment!"

The power to rush ahead towards the glowing mass of energy. The strength that Accelerator had lacked from the moment he escaped from Academy City and

arrived in Russia. The strength that boy had planted in him after their confrontation, finally blazed up within Accelerator's chest, and exploded.

"AAH!~ Fuck, I admit it! I want to protect her! I don't want to lose her!! I don't even want to think about the possibility of losing her!! I will face anything in order to protect this dream of mine!!!!"

Accelerator would not be able to suppress that enormous energy just with Reflection. Facing the angel of science, whom he has not yet determined to be friend or foe, Accelerator yelled with all his might.

"STOP THAT THING!!"

Did he make it in time?

Was there still time to act?

The mass of energy exploded. A pure white sphere of light exploded outwards, consuming everything in its path. Even if one closed their eyes, they would still have been blinded by that tremendous light. The pitch black night became a ceiling of pure brilliant white. Everything within a radius of several tens of kilometers should have become ash. This was not a simple explosion, but one of a Special Energy. It would not have been weird for some crazy side effects to be produced.

There was a very high chance that the explosion could have turned the surroundings into an uninhabitable wasteland. However, as the explosion expanded outwards, it started to warp unnaturally. The angel of science threw the gargantuan energy inside it at Accelerator, who manipulated the vectors inside that energy into a transparent shield and threw it around the ball of energy. Like a shell, it encased the explosion which had already expanded to 300 meters. Inside the shell, the energy from the explosion built up as the expanding light was trapped, unable to unleash its wrath on the land.

It seemed impossible, but the light and sound intensified even more. But Accelerator did not give up, and mustered all his strength, strengthening the barrier around the giant orb of light. For several seconds, the mass of energy was contained inside the shell.

And then...

Acqua of the Back, after confirming the dispersion of the mass of Telesma, slowly let go of his giant sword. His entire body was soaked in blood. His strength had vanished from his body.

Finally, he collapsed to the ground, his great sword still impaled in the ground. Acqua had a slight smile on his face. He had achieved his goal.

He had dispersed some of the archangel's Telesma, and given Fiamma's foes a fighting chance. Even though Fiamma wielded immense power, he was too overconfident, and would underestimate the power of the factions that had allied to fight against him. Just like Acqua himself used to be, he mused.

Acqua's internal systems were a mess, and the last traces of magic had been burned out of him. He estimated that he himself would not live for much longer. Well, at least he would be dragging the archangel along with him. He had done enough.

His goal had not been to live to see Fiamma fall. He had already prepared something special, that would allow everyone to get one step closer towards Fiamma, high in the sky. So as long as everyone could be happy in the future, Acqua had achieved his goal. Even if he could not be a part of that future, a mercenary like him would not be needed anyway.

"Dammit!!!"

Acqua heard someone shout, and saw a young Asian man approach him through the snow. If Acqua's memory served him right, he was the boy who had defended that village.

"What happened here? These wounds, they don't look like gunshot wounds... What happened, dammit?!! Hey guys, I don't know any emergency medical procedures, can you guys do something?"

A man and a girl rushed towards either side of Acqua, carrying what seemed to be bandages. Acqua's expression did not change, for he knew what condition his body was in.

"There's no need for that...."

Tasting blood in his mouth, Acqua continued.

"You can't save me. This is a battlefield, and medical supplies are very limited. Save them for someone who will benefit from them. Don't waste them on me."

"Stop fussing!"

"Though I cannot tell you the details, just then I confronted the one who instigated all this conflict. At the very least I managed to deliver a surprise attack on him, but he could well retaliate. It's too dangerous to stay here. You people should leave now."

"I said shut up!! If that's the situation, that's all the more reason I can't leave you!! I've had enough of war!! I'm not just gonna watch as anyone else dies!!"

"I have achieved my goal. Anything more and I would just be in the way."

"Then...What about the people waiting for you?"

Shiage's pained voice stopped Acqua in his tracks.

"You've managed to survive in these situations for such a long time. That time you saved me and my friends, it didn't seem like anything special to you, as that was the path you walked. So a guy like you will never be alone."

"Even if you don't think about it, there are several people relying on you. What will happen to them?"

This was a power that did not exist in Acqua's heart.

Every word, every sentence, was like a needle stabbing into Acqua's body. Acqua's body, sliding down the path towards death, was pinned down by these words. Shiage's words dragged Acqua back from the verge of death.

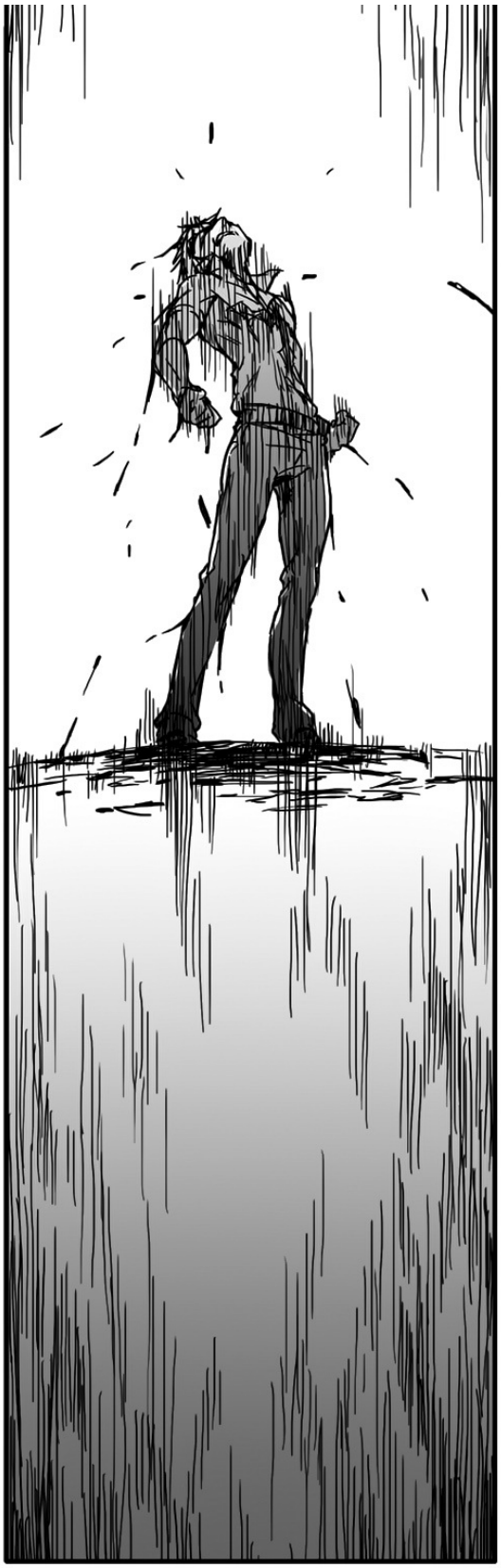
"To die for the sake of the world, to die to protect others, who would accept such stupid excuses?!! They are unacceptable! The reason you fight is not to let those waiting for you to not be able to do anything other than cry!!"

His thoughts were cloudy because of the lack of blood, but inside Acqua's mind, several images floated forward. Knight Leader, the elders from the astrology

department, and the people he had saved in his past.

And.

The third princess of England.



"Stand up, hero!"

Ignoring the fact that Acqua was in a state of near death, Shiage grabbed him and pulled him up.

"STAAAANDD UPPPP!!!!!!!!"

He roared with all his might. That sound was directed at Acqua, who was still lying in the snow. Acqua could hear his heart beat. He was still alive. It was not over. He could still move.

"UWWWWOOOOOOOOAHHHHHH!!!!!"

With a cough that racked his body, and sent more blood spewing out of his mouth, Acqua stood up once more.

His powers as a Saint had gone.

His power as a member of God's Right Seat had also been lost.

His body had been ravaged. He was now a *normal human*. Clenching his teeth, Acqua pulled out the last vestiges of magical energy hidden within him. It was only enough to keep him standing and prevent more blood from coming out of his wounds.

He had not much strength left, not nearly enough to wield his giant sword. However that was not important. A real hero was definitely not one who gave up. He was one, who upon hearing the support of the people, would get back up, no matter how many times he had fallen to his knees.

Part 9

“I see.”

Fiamma of the Right reached for the staff.

The staff had Index's remote control spiritual item on the top in order to control the archangel.

It seemed Gabriel had headed for the surface having detected the parchments, but had failed to retrieve them. Those parchments contained information necessary for Fiamma's Project Bethlehem.

But it was not a problem.

Fiamma and Gabriel's senses were linked and Gabriel's abilities of perception were quite different from those of a human. Even if the parchments had been in the target's pocket, the archangel could obtain the magical information recorded on them.

He had the necessary knowledge.

Fiamma had extremely deep knowledge of Michael and he had filled in the gaps with knowledge obtained from the 103,000 grimoires.

There was something Fiamma had lacked.

He had lacked the symbols of the archangels other than Michael. In other words, the symbols of the other members of God's Right Seat.

(As long as I have the unconfirmed information gathered from all across Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church's top secret inferences into the spells of each angel, it won't be a problem.)

He no longer needed the staff.

Fiamma removed Index's remote control spiritual item from the top.

"I see, I see, I see."

He spun the staff around.

"Fuck you, you piece of shit," Fiamma said with a grin on his face.

He snapped the staff in half.

He tossed the wreckage to the side and then brought his right hand forward. He knew the general location. Holding his palm in that direction, he muttered something under his breath.

Sound disappeared.

A huge beam of light shot out.

It smashed and melted straight through the wall of the Star of Bethlehem, blew through many different buildings, and headed in a straight line for his target.

There was no resistance.

It would have been a problem if there had been.

That right hand must have deflected it.

An odd noise could be heard from around Fiamma's right shoulder. The partially-disintegrated third arm was beginning to detach. However, that was no major impediment to Fiamma now that his knowledge was reinforced with the 103,000 grimoires.

He took one step forward.

With just that, Fiamma's body moved 5 kilometers forward. It didn't matter that the floor was missing between the two locations and it was just open air. As long as he had an open horizontal path, he could move anywhere.

He arrived in a room.

It was the ceremony room in which Sasha Kreutzev's body had been used in order to call in the archangel. In the previous blast, over half the room had been destroyed and most of the interior had fallen down to the lower level as if it had been forcibly dragged down. That boy stood alone in the ceremony room. Fiamma caught a glimpse of something red through the hole to the lower level. It was possible that someone had been gotten caught up in the destruction and had fallen down.

"You are quite a troublesome boy," Fiamma said.

He played with Index's remote control spiritual item in one hand.

"Thanks to you, I have to carry out the ceremony before Academy City or England can interfere. As such, it's about time I took your right hand."

"…Do you really think it'll go that easily? Misha is gone. I'm not really sure why things have gone so well, but we humans won against an archangel. The scales have clearly tipped in our favor."

"Oh, don't worry," said Fiamma as he pointed up toward the heavens.

The physical walls and ceiling had been blown to pieces by his earlier attack. This allowed the unnatural night sky to be visible past the crumbled building materials.

That was when that spiky haired boy realized something.

Archangel Misha Kreutzev had been defeated, but the state of the sky had not changed.

"The angel's role ended once the sky had been turned to this night sky I wanted," Fiamma said as he greatly stretched out his third arm. "I mentioned that the symbols of Uriel and Raphael were out of alignment earlier. And I also mentioned that the name Misha Kreutzev was not suitable for Gabriel as it is derived from Michael."

The spiky haired boy seemed to be on guard, but it was too late.

By the time Fiamma was finished speaking, it was already too late.

"Using Gabriel to remove all the stars from the sky and leaving the Star of Bethlehem as the only thing floating in the incomplete heavens that are filled with Telesma was establishing the large flow of power needed for the ceremony to reset the four elements. …You stopped the magic circle covering the surface of the sky that Misha caused during Angel Fall and the Croce di Pietro that used the arrangement of the stars as seen from the earth's surface, so I'm sure I do not need to explain just how much important magical meaning there is in controlling the screen known as the heavens. The prophets believed that a certain star would appear in the night sky to mark the birth of the Son of God. I suppose you could say I am carrying out a large-scale spell that uses that legendary truth. Well, I've

also affected the flow of power on the surface by moderately destroying churches and cathedrals all across the world."

The heavens and the earth.

Three and four.

He had completely monopolized those important numbers in Christian culture.

"What…? Why did you do all this…?"

"You didn't really think this would all be over after I merely got the Star of Bethlehem into the sky, did you?" said Fiamma mockingly. "This is just the means. My goal is much higher. The Star of Bethlehem, World War III, and the remote control spiritual item for the 103,000 grimoires were all just preparations. But that's not all. The most important part is this right arm. It all resides here." Fiamma spoke cheerfully. "All I'm saying is that I could not carry out the ceremony I wish to without setting the stage like this. And the completion of the first stage comes with a nice benefit."

An odd sound rang out.

A starry sky spread out.

First yellow, then red, followed by blue, and lastly green. On Fiamma's signal, the oddly colored stars spread out across the dark night sky like veils being drawn.

The Star of Bethlehem was a huge planetarium.

"Did you know?"

The stars were colors that would be absolutely impossible in nature. A complete amateur who knew almost nothing of magic should not have been able to analyze what they meant, but he understood in a very deep part of his existence. He understood that he was seeing the transparent true world. He understood that he was feeling the four elements having been returned to their proper places.

"Fire, water, wind, earth. Each of those four elements carries the leading edge of its type of power, but at the same time, using one element has a broader effect on

the three other elements. That is why all large-scale ceremonies except practical battle ones use one of each symbolic weapon as opposed to just the symbolic weapon of the primary element. That is true even in fire ceremonies. In other words, my fire has always held the requirements needed to control all four elements. By controlling all four, I should gain a vast amount of power. …But that is all if the distortion in the lineup of the world's elements did not exist."

Fiamma continued speaking.

"Proper power cannot be perfectly used except for in a proper world."

Something invisible exploded out from Fiamma.

It was killer intent.

The pressure was so overwhelming that Kamijou felt a sensation on his skin like it was being torn.

"…"

But that was no reason to step back.

The man before his eyes was holding Index's remote control spiritual item. To destroy it, he had to crush the source of that pressure.

Kamijou naturally clenched his right fist.

His focus was naturally drawn toward Fiamma's right shoulder.

It wriggled.

The third arm wriggled.

Something vast resided within that power that was supposed to be suffering as it disintegrated.

"Now I will show you what proper power is."

War Report

Mikoto limply sat on a snowy plain in Russia.

A Sister spoke to her.

“Have you calmed down? asks Misaka.”

“Yes… Sorry about that. Could you explain that again?”

“Nu-AD1967. They are taking preparations to fire former Soviet Union strategic nuclear warheads, reports Misaka summarizing the contents.”

“Wait, wait. When you say nuclear warheads, you mean like nukes!? Has the Russian president given the go ahead on that?”

Mikoto’s face was pale, but the Sister’s was completely expressionless as she tilted her head to the side slightly.

“There is no mention of it over the standard military lines, says Misaka as she double checks. Also, there is no sign of the nuclear confirmation code having been sent, says Misaka in an additional report. It is just a guess, but this could be the actions of an independent unit under the control of the man named Nikolai Tolstoy.”

“But…” Mikoto frowned. “So you’re saying a single unit of the Russian army is bringing out missiles loaded with nuclear warheads? But I thought they couldn’t be detonated without the confirmation code from the president.”

Otherwise, some random soldier with dangerous ideas could pull the trigger dooming mankind. A country that had facilities to fire a large number of missiles needed security that solid.

“Not necessarily, says Misaka as she listens to the transmission with a worried

look on her face.”

“Not even your eyebrows have moved.”

“It seems this independent unit is using exchanged warheads, says Misaka in utter shock.” The Sister shook her head. “Have you heard of the large number of nuclear warheads and radioactive materials that were leaked from Russia at the end of the Cold War? asks Misaka to make sure.”

“I’ve heard of it, yeah, but I don’t know how much of it is true and how much is just an urban legend.”

“What about the many nuclear engineers and technology that leaked out at the same time?”

“…”

“The warheads were sold with the goal of being used, but most of them could not actually be detonated due to the issue of the confirmation code, informs Misaka. However, certain warheads were an exception. For those, the warhead’s security lock was set inside the outer shell surrounding the nuclear material, explains Misaka. In other words…”

“If they removed the contents and made a new outer shell to put it in…”

“They could then detonate the nuclear material, says Misaka giving her conclusion. And it would have the exact same destructive power, adds Misaka.”

The Sister spoke smoothly.

It was unlikely the military transmission she had intercepted just then was enough to give her that much information. She may have been gathering information in real time over the Misaka Network.

“When the former Soviet Union collapsed, those exchanged warheads were mainly created by various organizations that were trying to gain independence from Russia, but Russia later hunted them all down in special military operations. They claimed this was to work towards world peace and to take responsibility for the nuclear weapons they had created, explains Misaka. The official records say those exchanged warheads were disassembled, lowered in

density, and reused as fuel for nuclear reactors."

"So this independent unit is using some reserves they had recovered? That means they have nuclear weapons they can fire at any time without the go ahead from the president."

"They are preparing a vehicle-style launcher to fire the exchanged warheads created from Nu-AD1967s at that sky fortress, says Misaka exposing their plan."

"This is no joke…" Mikoto muttered.

No matter how mysterious that fortress was or how many times the boy on it had survived seemingly certain death, neither of them would escape the detonation of those weapons.

And the damages would not end there.

Even if that strange fortress had insanely strong defenses allowing it to withstand the nuclear explosions, that would not be a happy ending.

The problem was the altitude of the target.

"America has been researching a safe small-scale nuclear warhead, right?"

"I assume you are referring to the project on a nuclear weapon with a destructive scale with a diameter of only 3-5 kilometers that does not send the ash of death in to the sky upon detonation, says Misaka to make sure. That is intended to be used in the destruction of underground facilities."

Even during the superheated race in developing nuclear weapons during the Cold War, there was a taboo. That was spreading the ash of death above a certain altitude. That was why warheads like MIRV were developed that rained down smaller nuclear warheads rather than using one giant bomb.

So why did they insist on avoiding sending the ash of death above a certain altitude?

What was the fear that kept even major countries seeing the possibility of a large-scale nuclear war from even considering that?

“This goes beyond bad… If they fire nuclear weapons at a target that high up…!!”

“Given the detonation range of the Nu-AD1967, the ash of death created by the attack on the floating fortress will continually spread throughout the atmosphere in great quantities and quite possible contaminate the entire earth, says Misaka reporting the result of the simulation she ran over the network. The negative effect of the radioactive material on living creatures and the obstruction of sunlight by the ash of death would alter the environment and have a negative effect on the growth of plants which would cause a food shortage, says Misaka expressing her concerns.”

A nuclear explosion on the surface already had a risk from the ash of death, so it was unknown just how far it would spread when that explosion was thousands and thousands of meters up in the air.

“You said they were preparing a vehicle-style launcher, right? Do you know where it is?”

“Misaka has a general idea from the contents of the transmission, but they will fire the missiles from a location over 70 kilometers away in order to avoid any harm to themselves, adds Misaka.”

“Hm.”

Mikoto looked around and then pointed in a certain direction with her chin.

A group of Academy City vehicles lay in that direction. A large number of tanks and armored vehicles were moving and firing along with quite a few powered suits.

“…Let’s just steal one of those. Can you drive one?”

Stiyl Magnus ran along the underground portion of St. George’s Cathedral. He was not in a room. He ran down a long stone corridor. With that at the center, St. George’s Cathedral contained a spider web of countless escape corridors that stretched out for kilometers. Some were real, some were fake, some were traps, and some were detours in case one was surrounded. They had various uses and

levels of importance.

Footsteps approached from behind.

The footsteps were very odd because the number of steps taken and distance covered did not match up.

(I can’t just continue to run.)

Stiyl gritted his teeth.

(Giving her leeway in her calculations makes it that much easier for Fiamma to use her!!)

Immediately afterwards…

“Chapter 15, Verse 4. Cutting off enemy’s escape route and carrying out the disposal of the enemy.”

The entire space shook.

The underground passageway ahead of Stiyl collapsed as if it had been crushed by a giant’s hand.

Stiyl spun around.

Two eyes glowed in the darkness.

Three more white lights floated around Index.

“Chapter 17, Verse 33. Characteristics of Norse mythology detected in the enemy. Reproducing and immediately activating the sword of the harvest god as a means of opposition.”

The three white lights flew toward Stiyl.

“Tch!!”

Stiyl immediately created a flame sword, but the three lights suddenly changed from their completely straight trajectory to movements that resembled those of a living creature allowing them to evade Stiyl’s flame sword.

(Freyr’s sword…!?)

Tools that would automatically fly through the air and certainly end the enemy’s life frequently showed up in legends from around the world and not just in Norse mythology. The sword of the harvest god Freyr was one of those. The legends said that if someone clever possessed it, it would fight on its own and bring about victory for its owner.

Norse mythology was a religion in which it was possible for both gods and people to die and be defeated. Freyr’s sword had never once been depicted as losing in Norse mythology.

That was how legendary it was.

That was how destructive it was.

The tips of the swords slipped through the gaps of the defense created by the flame sword and headed for Stiyl’s throat.

“…Innocentius!!” he yelled out ignoring the damage it would apply to himself.

The flame giant that appeared immediately afterwards both repelled the three floating swords and blew its user, Stiyl, back with an intense blast.

Stiyl’s back struck the wall of rubble that was blocking off the passageway.

He had delayed his fate, but that would not be enough to turn things around.

“Chapter 20, Verse 9. Detected a distorted Christian motif. Beginning construction of the most effective spell in response to the aforementioned spell. Preparations for the activation of the spell named Eli Eli Lema Sabachthani are complete. Activating it immediately.”

Giant magic circles originating from Index’s face floated in the air and dark red beams of light were emitted from them.

They easily ripped through Innocentius causing the giant to vanish and struck the pile of rubble right next to Stiyl gouging straight through it.

“…I see,” Stiyl said while just barely managing to stay on his feet while

balancing himself with a hand on the wall. “I’m up against 103,000 grimoires. I guess it isn’t too surprising I can’t oppose you with just one Innocentius.”

However, he continued to speak.

“But I never said I had only one trump card.”

An explosive noise rang out.

There was a flame giant next to Stiyl.

However, it was not just on the right or on the left.

There was an Innocentius on both sides.

“Double.”

Index stared at that phenomenon for a bit.

Finally, she opened her mouth to speak with her eyes as emotionless as ever.

“Chapter 21, Verse 44. Constructing a countermeasure to multiple targets. Activating it imme-…”

But then…

“Triple.”

Another explosive noise rang out.

Index’s voice suddenly stopped. It seemed she was considering whether the command she was in the middle of stating would get in her way or not.

Stiyl was expending a massive amount of magic power which meant he was also expending a massive amount of his life force that was the raw material for magic power. He knew this, but he still smiled while sweating profusely.

“Did you really think I would just ignore what I was capable of just because I knew I had insufficient power back there?”

Of course, Stiyl could not use three different Innocentii at one time using just his

own power. No matter how much one redesigned a spell, there were some things that were simply beyond the level of what an individual could accomplish. Stiyl had not surpassed that barrier.

Instead, he had made up for what he lacked with the spiritual items within St. George's Cathedral.

Stiyl had been running around in order to find, gather, and use the materials he needed.

However, the grimoire library did not stop.

She continued her analysis completely mechanically.

"Chapter 23, Verse 11. Detected a Trinity construction. Confirmed that the target spell is three but bears a single role so that the magic power expenditure is lower due to the magic power circulating between the three bodies," Index said as the three swords of the harvest god floated around her, the red blood-like wings flew from her back, and the magic circles within her eyes glowed eerily. "One countermeasure has been decided on. A focused attack on one of the three will destroy the Trinity construction."

They had found it.

It was a bit after they had split up with Acqua. Hamazura and Takitsubo watched with just their heads sticking out from behind a distant tree. They could see figures moving about 50 meters away. Standing there were soldiers armed with assault rifles and wearing white combat uniforms that had a slightly different design from the normal military uniforms.

It seemed they were keeping guard.

Further back was the base of a small mountain. Three large tanker trucks were parked there. A number of other narrower vehicles were there as well. A number of men were working on something there.

There was something like a pole that was about 5 meters long.

But there wasn’t just the one. The men stuck over 10 such poles into the ground at even intervals and hooked thick hoses to them from the tanker trucks.

“Is that the steam dispenser…?” Hamazura muttered while hiding behind the tree.

Takitsubo nodded next to him.

“Those tanker trucks may hold the preservative gel. I guess those poles are some kind of atomizer.”

One of the guards turned his head in their direction and they hurriedly brought their heads behind the tree.

Hamazura pulled out his cell phone and called Glickin.

Since he knew the location of the village, the location of the steam dispenser, and the direction of the wind, he could figure out which way the villagers should flee.

However, there was no proof that no one would be infected if the dissemination actually took place.

He hung up and looked out again. It seemed around 10 guards were spread out in a large circle around the steam dispenser. It seemed they were not putting all the poles in one place. Instead, they were spreading them out throughout the area. However, it would still be difficult to sneak past the guards and get to the tanker trucks in the center. Even if they managed to cut through a blind spot, the guards would likely soon notice their footprints.

Hamazura’s focus turned to the cold assault rifle in his hand.

(I can’t win against that many. Not to mention that they’re professional soldiers. I probably couldn’t even manage if it were 1 on 1. Once the first shot is fired, there’s no turning back.)

However, he couldn’t just silently watch. Even then, they were carrying out the preparations to disseminate the bacteriological weapon. Once they were done, they would then make the worst possible decision. He had to stop them before that happened.

Hamazura sweated nervously amid the freezing blizzard, but then Takitsubo said something he didn't expect.

"…Hamazura, we should wait until they leave."

"What?"

Hamazura frowned. The way things were going, the Russian special unit would end up using the bacteriological weapon. If that happened, Digurv and the others' village would be done for.

"Hamazura, the report said that the bacterial wall used in the Kremlin Report is the type that spreads through the air and that it enters the body through the skin as well as the respiratory organs. Also, it can break down oil content, so it can open holes in the filters used in masks and ducts to prevent contamination. As such, most defenses will not work against it."

"And? If it's that dangerous, there's even more reason not to let them disseminate it!"

In response to Hamazura's question, Takitsubo pointed in the direction of the special unit working in the snowy plain beyond the forest.

"How are they going to escape the bacterial wall?"

"Hah…?"

"Their protective masks and thick suits won't work. It can even get into cutting edge tanks. As such, they would take the bacterial wall with them after disseminating it."

Now that she had mentioned it, he realized she was right.

And when he looked back, he realized the guards were not wearing any giant masks or anything despite dealing with a dangerous bacteriological weapon.

"Hamazura. I think they are going to use a timed device. They will set up the steam dispenser and the bacterial wall and then hurry away to a safe place. If they're going to survive with a bacteriological weapon that masks and suits won't stop, that's their only option. But then…"

“I see. We don’t have to fight them. Once they leave, there will be a bit of a lag before the timer reaches zero. If we can head over and destroy the steam dispenser device in that time, we can stop this!!”

“But there won’t be much time. That special unit wants to ensure their own safety, but they also want to disseminate the bacterial wall as quickly as possible. With such a large device, I doubt we will have time to destroy it all. It would probably be better to search for a weak point.”

Hamazura and Takitsubo only had a handgun and an assault rifle. They couldn’t exactly blow it up. The fuel tanks on the tanker trucks and the other vehicles probably had gas in them, so that was likely their best bet.

The device was roughly constructed from the around 10 steam dispenser poles and the 3 tanker trucks. The other narrower vehicles were probably for the work.

It would likely be pretty easy to blow up one or two of them using the fuel tanks, but the flames, smoke, and heat caused would prevent them from continuing. Even if they didn’t go right up to the flames, a wall of heat could easily burn human skin and even lungs just from the wind. Blowing up all of the vehicles would take planning like with the demolition of a building. Of course, Hamazura and Takitsubo did not have time for that.

That was why they needed a weak point.

If they could find a weak point that would stop the entire device just by destroying that one point, they could avoid the aforementioned problem.

Hamazura narrowed his eyes and stared through the blizzard before finally speaking.

“…There’s a power truck.”

“?”

“The armored vehicle near the right tanker. The thick power cables are centralized around it. It probably has a generator inside. In a C military movie Kinuhata showed me, they mentioned that modern military items were becoming more and more electronic with a focus on the means of aiming. With night vision and assistance from UAVs, it’s all very convenient, but having batteries

constantly dying is a problem. That's why stations to recharge on the battlefield are needed whether it's in the desert or the jungle."

"But it's an armored truck. We can't blow that up very easily. If we could stick something inside it, maybe, but if they leave the hatch locked, we won't even be able to open it."

"We don't need to blow it up." Hamazura matched his face to Takitsubo's height and used his fingertip to guide her gaze to the back of the armored truck. "Three exhaust pipes are sticking out at the top of the back of the thing. That's too many for just the thing's engine. The core of the power truck is likely a diesel generator. Our goal is to stop the electricity from being sent from the power truck to the overall steam dispenser device. In other words, we just need to stop the generator."

"?"

"Whether it's gasoline, diesel, a truck engine, or a generator, the basic structure is the same. If we stick dirt or something in the exhaust pipe, the internal-combustion engine will stop. Academy City's Anti-Skill has a type of jelly bazooka that similarly stalls the engine of an escaping car."

"What if that's a giant mass of lithium-ion batteries?"

"Then we just sever all the cables coming from the truck. I'd rather avoid that if possible though, because I don't want to get electrocuted."

Then Takitsubo's small hand pulled on Hamazura's clothes.

The special unit working beyond the curtain of snow caused by the blizzard had begun to move. They were still quickly moving back and forth between parts of the device, but they were climbing into the smaller vehicles one after another after receiving a transmission over their radios.

"Hamazura."

"I know."

Once the soldiers left the area, they had to hurry over toward the steam dispenser device and begin their attack on the power truck's exhaust pipe. They didn't

have much time. It was possible that the device was set to activate after only a few minutes. The fact that they did not know exactly when it would activate accelerated their impatience.

However, they also could not afford to screw up.

They could not win against that special unit, so they could not allow themselves to be caught. They had to stay hidden until the soldiers had completely left the area.

Hamazura and Takitsubo knelt down behind the trees and suppressed their breathing.

(…Is this going to work?)

Hamazura felt the beating of his heart much more than usual.

Those soldiers had done all that. He could not deny the possibility of landmines having been set up around the device. Hamazura knew from Digurv's village that cowardly traps like that were openly used in that country.

The sound of many different engines began.

They would be leaving soon.

If they watched the path they took, they might be able to tell if there were any traps. At the very least, they would not put any landmines in the path they would take to leave. Hamazura knelt down and focused with his eyes as wide as plates. In that blizzard, he didn't know how long the tire tracks would remain in the snow. He had to memorize the safe route in his own head.

That was when something he had not expected happened.

A gunshot rang out.

Snow right next to Hamazura blew into the air. As soon as he realized a rifle bullet had hit there, he frantically got down on the ground. However, it was too late. He knew very well what that gunshot meant.

"Shit, they noticed us!!"

The trucks leaving the area suddenly stopped. A few doors opened and the heavily armed soldiers got out. Hamazura knew that they had no way of winning. They would be at the disadvantage even against only one of them.

In that instant, the best plan Hamazura could come up with was to let Takitsubo get away no matter what.

Hamazura made up his mind as he turned off his assault rifle's safety and desperately tried to control his rapid shallow breathing.

But what was he supposed to do?

Sweat leaked from the hand holding the grip. His mind was blank. With his tension at its maximum, Hamazura heard a high-pitched whistle-like sound.

He looked straight up.

Flying through the air was…

(An Academy City fighter!?)

The huge aircraft was over 80 meters long. The monstrous airplane cut through the air and Hamazura had no time to think of anything else.

This was because there was an explosion immediately afterwards.

A bomb had not been simply dropped down.

It wasn't until much later that he realized that a shell had been fired in a straight line accelerated by magnetism or something so that it struck the ground at over the speed of sound.

A tremendous explosive noise seemed to come from all directions.

The steam dispenser and the related vehicles at the foot of the mountain disappeared in a sea of flames. They were quite a bit away, but the escaping trucks were knocked over. Hamazura and Takitsubo had to bury themselves in the snow.

A radio that must have been blown there by the blast lay next to Hamazura. It

had probably belonged to one of the soldiers.

He heard a voice coming from it.

It was speaking Japanese.

“Hey. From the magnetic reaction, I can tell someone’s there. If you’re someone who volunteered from the goodness of your heart, then I’d like to shake your hand. I’m pretty much the same.”

“Ghah. Dammit. Academy City…?”

It seemed odd to Hamazura.

Since he was hearing that voice from a Russian radio, the transmission must have been sent on a frequency anyone could listen in on. That wasn’t how the dark side of Academy City functioned.

Which meant…

(He’s from Academy City but not from the dark side of it…? So he’s from the normal part of the forces....In other words, he’s a teacher…?)

“Yup. It’s all thanks to Ekalielya-chan and the others opening up the way over the Sea of Japan that I’m able to carry out this philanthropic work. Since the distinction between a fighter aircraft and a ground-attack aircraft has gotten so blurred of late, there’s so much more I have to do.”

At that time, an odd chemical reaction occurred to Hamazura Shiage’s mental state.

He had fled from Academy City. He was thankful for the help, but he couldn’t do anything if that monstrous aircraft were to chase after him.

But that did not change the fact that his body was almost limp from relief. Everything before that had just not been normal. It wasn’t right for a simple delinquent to be up against privateers and a Russian special unit.

As he thought that, the monstrous fighter took a sharp turn and circled back. Along the flight path, a large number of bombs were fired with magnetism

spreading flames across the ground in a straight line.

Light.

Noise.

Hamazura was quite a bit away, but he still covered his face. However, he could still feel strength leaving his body. His stiffened muscles were relaxing.

(We might be saved.)

Those who were meant to protect the peace were protecting them from unreasonable violence.

Even though that monstrous fighter's sights might turn on him later, Hamazura felt calm and relaxed.

(Digurv's village, Takitsubo, and I won't be taken out by that bacteriological weapon.)

He wondered what the pilot thought.

Did he think it was already over? Or did he only know someone was down there from the magnetic reaction and he didn't actually know who it was?

And then another problem came to mind.

"Hey, is this really okay? That bacterial wall is a killer virus, right?"

"That's why I'm going to thoroughly burn everything away. Just lay low, shut your eyes, plug your ears, and don't open your mouth. They're white phosphorus-based bombs, so it won't be too loud, but they still have a nice shockwave."

It seemed Hamazura didn't have time to object.

Immediately afterwards, numerous bombs struck the ground.

Despite having plenty of potential energy just by falling normally, the bombs were accelerated by magnetism.

With a huge shockwave, a crater formed at the location of the steam dispenser device and a sea of flames exploded out immediately afterwards. Unlike with a simple flamethrower, the odd flames spread out more glutinously.

In an instant, that devilish device was destroyed two or three times over.

The Russian soldiers did not fare well either.

The bombings from the sky had not been aimed directly at the humans, but they got wrapped up in the after effects of the explosions. They were knocked into the air and then fell back to the ground where they stopped moving. It seemed they had lost consciousness.

Perhaps caused by the explosions and shockwaves, a huge amount of snow crashed down from the mountain slope.

Hamazura was in an area a good bit away, but the snow that crashed into the ground and flew up into the air enveloped him all at once like the powder from a fire extinguisher.

His vision was completely obstructed. He could not even see Takitsubo who should be standing next to him. He could not even tell that he was standing within a forest.

“(…Takitsubo!? Where are you!? Are you okay!?)” Hamazura said in a lowered voice.

He stretched out his arms and searched around, but he only found the hard sensation of thick tree trunks.

What had happened to the steam dispenser, the bacteriological weapon, or the special unit?

Hamazura wandered about while left in disorder due to not being able to see.

How long had it been? Had it been more than 10 minutes?

He could not even judge the passage of time.

Suddenly, his hand managed to grab something soft.

“Takitsubo!!”

He frantically embraced her and checked her face.

It was Takitsubo Rikou all right.

The short black hair. The drowsy eyes. Her white skin was slightly pale due to the cold despite her warm clothes.

But…

“…Hamazura…”

Had Takitsubo Rikou been wearing a thin yellow autumn coat? Had her legs been covered in stockings? Had she been that tall? Had her voice been that low?

“…Hamazura…”

And *had the Takitsubo Hamazura knew ever smiled at him so evilly*?

“It’s been a while, Haamazuraaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

A crack appeared from the inside of Takitsubo’s face that looked almost like that of a small animal. Another girl’s face peered out from within.

A more brutal face.

A more villainous face.

A face that expressed the darkness of Academy City perfectly.

(…She’s…!!)

A white light too pure resided deep within one of her eyes.

As soon as she opened that eye so wide it looked like the corner would crack, a bombardment of light shot toward Hamazura’s face.

He swung his head to the side with all his might and a tremendous amount of light and heat passed by his ear. It plowed through some trees and flew off upwards where it grazed the main wing of the Academy City fighter there. The

aircraft lost control and Hamazura could tell a long narrow box was fired from it, but he couldn’t turn his head to keep track of what was going on there.

The #4 Level 5.

Meltdowner.

“Mugino Shizuri…!!”

He thrust her away from him and frantically tried to move backwards, but his back struck a tree trunk.

Why was she there? There was no point in asking that question. The woman ripped off the special makeup and pulled a melted fake eye from the socket. From the look on her face, he felt a strong tenacity that blew away all reason from within his mind.

Where had Takitsubo Rikou gone?

What should he do in order to ensure that she and himself survived?

In response to the death that was approaching him, Hamazura’s breathing turned shallow and rapid.

He had one thought in his heart: I have to do it.

He had to settle things once and for all with that monster, with Mugino Shizuri.

Afterword

To those who have continued reading from Volume 1: welcome back.

To those who bought the 23 books all at once: welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

It's been split in two!! …You're probably wondering what that was all of a sudden, but this book was split in two. Originally, this was to be the halfway point of A Certain Magical Index Volume 21 and there would be just as many pages following this part, but my great editor gave me the sage advice that the book would be a bit too thick that way, so it was split in two on short notice. This afterword was put together fairly quickly, too.

Because it was split down the middle, this volume ended up prominently featuring that girl who appeared in Volume 4. A lot of different characters stood up to her in succession and I am quite moved that the people of this series' world have come so far.

One person is heading for the resolution of his problem, one has yet to find the clue to solve his problem, and one has been thrown into an even more chaotic hell. The protagonists have been dropped into very different situations, but I think you will enjoy what happens regarding them in the next volume.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and my editor Miki-san. I think the intensification of the war made my illustration requests that much more difficult. I am very thankful that they stuck with me this time, too.

And I give my thanks to the readers. 23 books is quite a lot and it's all thanks to you that I've come this far. Please keep reading.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

But Misha is not the only archangel in the world of this series.

-Kamachi Kazuma

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 21

Author: **Kamachi Kazuma**

Illustrator: **Haimura Kiyotaka**

Translated by **Js06**, **pikachuwei** & **Teh_Ping**

War Report 2 - Teh_Ping | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Chapter 5 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 6 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 7 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 8 - Parts 1-5,7,8 - pikachuwei;
The Rest - Js06 — Completed
War Report 3 - Js06 — Completed
Afterword - Js06 — Completed